

For
VALOR

COVINGTON CLARKE

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By

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THE REILLY & LEE CO.
CHICAGO NEW YORK

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FOR VALOR

CHAPTER I

THE FLYING BARSTOWS

Red McGee sat on a battered trunk at the door of his dressing tent, idly watching his brother Dan fold his parachute in preparation for packing it in a long, barrel-like wooden cylinder known as the "cannon." Within half an hour the big black bag, now slowly filling, would be surging and tugging at its ropes, striving vainly to break its earth-binding fetters. At the last moment Dan would crawl into the black "cannon," his 'chute packed with the painstaking care employed by a man who knows that death is the price of carelessness. Then the rocket atop the barrel, provided with a cover protecting against fire, would be primed and the hawk-nosed barker would mount a box and signal for silence. With colorful adjectives and oratorical tones he would duly impress his yokel audience.

"Lay-de-es and gentlemen! You are now about to witness the most breath-taking spectacle of the

ages. In a few moments this silken bag, straining to be free, will soar aloft carrying to dizzy heights a man who since boyhood has flirted with Death and laughed it to scorn. Cramped into yonder cannon is the peerless dare-devil of the air, that nerveless companion to the birds, Professor Daniel Barstow, one of the last of the famous Barstows, who for years took their lives in their own hands for your public amusement. Once in the clouds, this dauntless man, who in reckless courage stands without a peer, will be literally blown from the mouth of yonder gun. Then, lay-dees and gentlemen, his fate is in the hands of the gods. Are you ready, Professor?"

"Ready," would come a muffled word from the cannon, and then from the barker, "Stand back! Stand back! Let go! Let go!"

Freed, the balloon would lunge skyward during that moment of breathless silence when a thousand speechless yokels in open-mouthed amazement watched the mounting bag. Then the band would strike up, breaking the tension, and speculation as to the outcome would fill the brief minutes of waiting.

It was all an old story to Red, the "come on stuff" that was a mere incident in the life of a carnival trooper. Red McGee (known as a Barstow in the circus and carnival world) was ten years the junior

of his brother Dan. He was the last of the once famous Flying Barstows, a family of aerial trapeze performers who in past years had thrilled audiences in England and America with intrepid feats of daring. And sixteen year old Red McGee, red-headed, freckle-faced, diminutive, small boned and wiry, had the physical appearance of one who was the last of a family that had petered out.

Something about his face belied his age. More years were written there than his birth certificate would disclose and there was a steady, earnest quality in his eyes not usually found in youth. Trooping up and down two continents had given him a wide experience. The "towners" did not interest him. There was no thrill in a balloon ascension. He had become almost blasé.

Of course, he had his moments of thrill each day when he climbed the high steel diving tower and stood for a moment looking down into the quiet water in the little tank sixty feet below, judging the distance, tensing the muscles while the barker below built up the proper dramatic tension with his, "Above you, Lay-de-es and Gentlemen, about to make his perilous leap, stands the youngest high diver in all the woor-eld, the last of the famous Barstows who will now take his life in his own hands for your pub-lick am-muse-ment."

Yes, Red had his moments of thrill, but in the

main it was a business of pack, unpack, into the tights and out again, going from one rube town to another, with never a game to play, with never a chance to make friends with boys of his own age. Since that day in England six years ago when his father and mother had flashed to their death in a wild tangle of ropes and sagging poles, Red had known no companionship except that of his brother Dan. Stunned and staggered by the dual loss of father and mother, Dan had squared his shoulders to a new task and decided to carry on. "The Flying Barstows," a name made famous through three generations of aerial performers, must continue to live so long as life itself remained in any member of that clan. Must twenty-four page posters crying the fame of the Barstows cease to color the walls of barns, buildings and billboards merely because a father and mother had met the death they had so long defied? No! That would not become the Barstow clan, was Dan's decision. It was really the good old Irish McGee clan, become Barstow because it looked better on the twenty-fours and sounded better on the barker's tongue. Once made famous, Barstow it remained.

Quite naturally Dan decided to carry on under that name, proud of his heritage and determined to make his kid brother a performer worthy of the name and fame of his forbears. That he had done

so was evidenced by the gaudy posters announcing that the youth was "The youngest high diver in the world." That was something to be proud of, even though Red, as he now sat watching his brother make ready for his jump, felt a little relief that this was their last day of the season and that to-night their train would rumble eastward and they would then take up the business of devising new stunts for the next season that would render the rubes even more speechless and fatten the common purse of the "Barstow Brothers."

Dan finished packing his parachute in the cannon and came over to the dressing tent, closely followed by a crowd of admiring small boys. Red followed him into the tent. To remain where he was meant that he would be instantly surrounded by this curious crowd of boys. They would whisper among themselves, stare at him as though he were a public exhibit, and doubtless one or two of the braver ones would ask a dozen foolish questions. Red never realized how much he affected the lives of these town and country boys. He never knew that they came to witness his high dive and then promptly went home to break collar bones and arms in a clumsy effort to duplicate the feat by diving from hay stacks and barn loft rafter beams. They came into his life at the fair grounds, a gawking horde, and they went out of his life again without making

the hundredth part of the impression upon him that he made upon them. He was a Barstow, and fading, torn posters, flapping in the wind, kept his memory alive long after he had departed.

"Well, kid," Dan said as he climbed into a pair of brilliant yellow tights, "this is the last jump."

"Yeah," Red answered, unconcerned. "Until next year."

"Longer than that, I'm afraid."

Red looked up quickly, his eyes questioning. Did Dan have a hunch? Sometimes 'chute jumpers had a premonition—

"You don't mean—"

"Naw, not that. She'll open, all right. Trust me for that. But we're quitting the game for a while, Bud."

"Quitting? What's on your chest?"

Dan peeped out of the tent to see how the bag was filling, then came back and sat down by his brother.

"Listen, Red. Maybe you won't understand this—I don't exactly myself—but every time I've gone up this summer and looked down on those yappin' yokels somethin' inside me has said, 'If you want to risk your life, why don't you risk it for your country?' We've wandered around so much that maybe you could say we haven't any country, but I was born in England, you know, and she's my country—if I have any. See?"

"Yeah," Red nodded. "I see. You think they'll take you?"

"Take me? They'll jump at the chance. They're needin' men bad—especially in the air. I'm a balloon man, kid. Not trained like they want 'em, maybe, but it wouldn't take long. I'd 'a' gone this summer and broke all our contracts if it hadn't been for you. I wanted to go ahead and save enough to take care of you while I'm over there."

"Aw, I'll be all right. I guess I'll go too."

"You're crazy, Bud. Why, you—" he drew back and stood looking at Red with approving eyes. "Why, you little shrimp, they wouldn't take a kid. Besides, you were born here. You're an American."

"Yeah, I know. But I can get some contracts over there doin' my tight wire act. They haven't all gone to war, have they?"

"I suppose not."

"I'll get on then—somehow. That way we'll be a little closer together."

"'Bout ready, Dan?" the barker stuck his head in the tent.

"Yes. Just a minute." He put his hand on Red's shoulder. "Then you don't mind, Bud? You don't think I'm wrong in quitting you?"

"Naw. I'll be all right."

"It's pretty tough to break up the Barstows this way, but it's the way I feel. See?"

"Yeah. Sure. Go ahead, Dan. They'll make you a captain or somethin', with all you know about balloons."

"I'm not so sure about that. And I don't care, if they'll just take me."

"Take you?" Red arose and unconsciously puffed out his chest. "Take you? A Barstow? Say, you can show those guys how to fly a balloon."

"Hey! Dan!" The barker was back again. "Hurry up."

"Comin'." He slapped Red on the shoulder. "Kid, you're not sore about it, are you?"

"Naw, but that crowd of towners out there will be if you don't go on and make that jump. Make a good one, Dan—for the last."

"Yeah. S'long, Bud."

"S'long, Dan."

Red followed to the tent door. The big black bag was straining at the ropes held by men and boys delighted with the honor of helping with the ascension. It would be a thing to talk about for years to come. The barker mounted his box and began droning away on the same old speech. "Lay-dees and gentlemen!"

But Red never heard him. He was watching Dan, a compressed ball of yellow tights, crawl into the black barrel. So here was the last stand of the Barstows? Here, before this crowd, "the peerless

dare-devil of the air" would make his last jump and then, without fuss or feathers, abandon it all and make his way into an arena of action where no barkers cried of brave deeds and where no posters shouted the fame of the Barstows. Here he was the bravest of the brave; over there he would be but another man in the great mass of men who were all equally brave.

"Who in reckless courage stands without a peer," came the raucous, nasal voice of the barker.

"The sap!" Red said aloud. "And they believe it. Gee! Just wait till he gets back from doin' his bit over there. Then they'll have something to bark about."

* * * * *

That night a train rumbling eastward carried the two McGees (now Barstow no longer) toward a port of embarkation. Red had gone to his berth early, fatigued by the long season and glad enough that it had come to a close. He was just on the borderland of sleep when he felt a slight tug at the berth curtain.

"Asleep, Bud?" Dan asked.

"About. What's on your chest?"

Dan parted the curtains and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"I'm not sleepy. You don't think I'm doin' wrong, do you, kid?"

"Naw."

"And you're not mad?"

"Gee! I'm tickled pink, Dan."

"I dunno. Maybe it ain't right. You're such a little shrimp—to leave alone."

"Aw, I'll be all right. Get away from here. I'm sleepy."

Dan reached down and tousled the mop of flaming red hair.

"You little shrimp! You're what the Guv'nor used to call 'a bit of all right.' "

CHAPTER II

TOO MANY NAMES

One morning three weeks later the brothers McGee stood at the port rail of a great ocean liner, wordless in their intense interest in the activities all about them as they steamed slowly toward the harbor of Liverpool. Stout little tugs, busy as bees, were breasting their ways through the choppy seas. A camouflaged destroyer, speedy and wasplike in lines, crossed the bow of the great liner with a seeming unseamanlike concern for proper distance and went dashing on toward the open channel. Three convoy ships, highly camouflaged and carrying Canadian troops, were steaming astern, led by a British cruiser that fairly bristled with armament. A small blimp loomed up out of the land fog and smoke, her nose tilted slightly as she climbed.

"Look!" Red pointed. "There's a balloon."

"They call 'em 'blimps,'" corrected a seaman who stood at their side. "She's on the lookout for subs, probably."

"A balloon? Looking for subs? I don't get you," Red said.

"Simple enough. You get up in the air, high enough, and you can see a long way under the water."

"But—you mean that German subs come in here? This close to shore?"

"You bet your bloomin' eyes they do. They would come in like a school of fish if we didn't look sharp. They're nervy enough."

Red turned to his brother. "Is that the kind of work you want to get into?" he asked, indicating the blimp.

"No. Observation balloons—at the front."

The sailor became interested. "You're coming over to join up?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Royal Flying Corps?"

"I suppose so. I'm going into the balloon corps, whatever that's called."

"But you are not English," the sailor said. "American, what?"

"Born right 'ere in merry hold Hengland," Dan answered, affecting a Cockney accent. "But I've spent most of my time in America. The kid here is an American. We've both played England, though."

The sailor blinked, not quite able to understand.

"Played England?" he questioned. "What kind of bloody game is that?"

Dan winked at Red. "It isn't a game. We're the Flying Barstows."

"Really!" exclaimed the seaman, simulating surprise. "Well, me lads, I'm the Sailin' McGees. What d'ye think o' that?"

"McGee!" Red echoed. "Why that's our name! Where are you from?"

"I'm from where every honest man comes from who carries the name McGee. I thought you said your name was Barstow?"

"It is and it isn't. You see, it's this way—"

"It is and it isn't, eh? Listen, me lads, a McGee is never anything else but a McGee. You've too many blasted names to suit me and I'm thinkin' the P. O. had better give you a lookin' over." He turned and left them.

Laughing at his pique, the two brothers again turned their attention to the interesting harbour mouth activities.

But the suspicious sailor went directly to the office of the Personnel Officer and gained audience under the plea that he had an important message for the ears of the P. O. alone.

"Well, what is it, my man?" The officer glanced up at the sailor who was standing stiffly at attention.

"Sir, there's a couple o' blokes aboard that could stand a little lookin' into."

"I dare say. What two have you in mind?"

"They calls themselves first one name and then another, sir. First they tells me that their bloomin' name is Barstow and next they tells me their name is McGee. I'm a McGee myself, sir, and I never heard of one bein' anything else. One of 'em says he's an Englishman and the other one, a youngster, says he's an American. The lad looks all right, but they were asking questions about balloons and the air service, and I don't like the way they change their name."

"You know you are forbidden to give out information to passengers?" the officer reminded him.

"Right, sir. I *got* information. That's not against orders, is it, sir?"

"No. We'll look into their case. You may go. What name did you say they gave?"

"I said they gave two, sir. First Barstow and then McGee. You can have your choice, but if they turn out to be McGees, then my name is Smith, sir." Saluting, the sailor turned from the room, highly indignant over the fact that the officer did not display the proper amount of interest and action. But then, he consoled himself, he never had known a P. O. with an over-supply of gray matter.

Two hours later, as Dan and Red stepped upon

the dock, a uniformed officer touched Dan on the shoulder. "Your name is McGee?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"And this lad? He is—"

"My brother."

"Good. Come with me, please. Both of you."

Wondering, they followed down the dock under the sheds and at last entered a room where three young military men were seated at a table. Dan was surprised to note that one of his steamer trunks was already in the room.

"You say your name is McGee?" the officer at the center of the table took up the role of chief questioner.

"Yes, sir."

"Humm! That is your trunk there?"

Across the top of the trunk, in gaudy yellow letters, was the legend: The Flying Barstows. Suddenly Dan saw a great light.

"Why, yes," he said smiling. "That is our professional name. You never heard of The Flying Barstows?"

"Never," the officer answered.

Dan and Red gazed at each other in amazement. It was inconceivable. Well, there was nothing like spreading light in dark places.

"The Barstows," Dan began, his chest swelling

with visible pride, "were for years the world's greatest—"

"Open the trunk," the officer interrupted rudely.

Dan complied. They went through it with painstaking care.

Some press clippings caught their eye and these they read. They were flattering enough to bear out the boast Dan had started to make.

"Humm!" mused the officer who appeared to be the chief. "What brings you to England, my man?"

"The war," Dan answered simply. "I am a balloon man, and I was born in Suffolk. My mother and father were English. I couldn't stay out any longer."

"You mean you intend to enlist?"

"Yes, sir. In the balloon corps."

"Why didn't you make that known to our consul in New York? You would have been furnished transportation."

"And probably put into the infantry or artillery, or some other such service. I paid my own way so that I might insist on serving where I am fitted."

"I see. And the lad—your brother?"

Red, always taciturn, had not opened his mouth since entering the room. He could safely leave things to Dan. Besides, stupid people always bored him. But forbearance had now ceased to be a virtue.

"Oh, I just came along to tell you that you are playing horse with the best parachute jumper in the U. S. A.," Red answered. "Cummon, Danny. Let's leave these saps to win their little old war by themselves."

"Harrump!" the officer coughed and flushed. "Not so fast, my lad." He turned to the Personnel Officer. "Send in the other McGee."

A moment later the sailor entered, standing at stiff attention and giving dark looks to the brothers McGee. The officer gave the sailor McGee a close questioning and soon developed that his entire suspicions were based upon the fact that there must be something wrong with a man who, born a McGee, would take another name. There was no greater name.

"This entire matter is a farce," the military man said, turning to the P. O. "These lads are all right. Their passports are in proper order. I think we need not further question their motives, or their names."

"Quite right," the P. O. agreed. Then turning to the sailor he said: "It appears, my man, that these men have a right to the name McGee. By your own word that makes you a Smith. You may go, *Mr. Smith.*"

The dour looking sailor turned away, fervently hoping that the story would not get back to his

messmates on board ship. He never could stand the name of Smith.

The military officer turned to make his apologies. "I am sorry that we thought it wise to detain you. So many spies, you know, and that sort of thing. But perhaps there is a bit of luck in it. You really wish to get into the balloon corps?"

"Yes, sir," Dan responded.

"Soon?"

"The sooner the better. Of course I want to get the Kid all set."

"Of course. Fortunately, I have a brother commanding in one of the balloon training areas. Perhaps if I gave you a letter to him you would be willing to call it all square?"

"I sure would."

"Good. Come with me."

That afternoon, armed with a letter of introduction which was to be an open sesame for Dan, the two brothers were on board train, rushing Londonward. Here and there they passed long trains of war munitions. Troops were everywhere. Every group had its sprinkling of service uniforms. But if all this martial evidence failed to impress one with the nearness of war, there was one thing that hammered it home with startling force. Here and there were men hobbling about on crutches. Here and there an empty sleeve, or a man in a wheel

chair; and once, as the train halted at a little station, Red looked beyond a hedge that encompassed the green lawn of a large military hospital. Under the trees were a dozen wheel chairs, all occupied, and several long benches were filled with soldiers taking the sun. Some had heads swathed in bandages, others walked with the aid of a cane or with crutches. Here was the grim evidence of war.

It was a phase which Red had never considered. His conception of war, made up from the newspaper reports and from stories of bravery and heroism, centered around the idea of glory. He recalled the story of the French Blue Devil who had made breastworks of the fallen enemy and, single-handed and alone, had turned a machine gun upon the oncoming counter attack and had lived to tell the tale. Glory! And there was the Shropshire lad whose courage and devotion had won him the coveted V. C. Glory! Glory! But here was the other side of the picture. Here were men who were paying the price of glory.

A new fear came into his heart. Danny wasn't going into a game that was all glory. The look that he gave Dan that minute was more comprehensive than words. Through years of companionship they had come to understand each other without employing words.

"It isn't all medals and souvenirs," Dan said, voicing the very thought that was in Red's mind.

"Somebody has to pay the price. I'm beginning to worry about one thing, Kid."

"You mean—that?" Red indicated a group of wounded men in the hospital grounds.

"No. I'm not thinking of that. I'm worrying about you. I'm afraid we'll have a hard time getting any contracts for you. This country is at war, Bud, and they're awake to the fact that they've got a real fight on their hands. They won't have much time or money from now on to spend on tight wire acts. I think you'd better beat it back to the States."

Red shook his head in vigorous protest. He had already reached the same conclusion concerning contracts, but he was into the thing now and was determined to see it through. Besides, he had an idea or two of his own which he did not care to discuss with Dan.

"Don't worry about me," he said. Then, in an effort to switch the subject, "Look at those big guns on those flat cars. Whew! Boy!"

"But I am worrying about you," Dan continued, taking no interest in the long train of guns flashing past their window. "I suppose I shouldn't have come. Let's call it off, Kid, and go back. I suppose I got mixed up on my sense of duty."

Red turned in his seat and faced him squarely. He never had much to say, and disliked argument, but here was a time when he must talk,

"You thought you ought to come over, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"We've saved enough to keep me for a year or two if I don't do a thing. The war can't last very long, and they'll pay you something, won't they?"

"Yes. Not much, but I won't have many needs. But I'm not so sure about the war not lasting long. I'm beginning to get my eyes opened. It's a serious business with these people. They've simply got to win."

"Any danger of them losing?" Red asked, innocently.

"You bet your life there is! Germany is the winner, so far. England has her back to the wall right now. If she lost, Germany would have everything—England, France—she could even lick America then. Why, it—" he hesitated, appalled by the same fear that was in the mind of every Englishman. "Why, it just can't happen," he continued, making a weak gesture with his hands. "It just *mustn't* happen—don't you see?"

"Yeah," said Red. "That's why you can't turn back. If England has her back to the wall, as you say, then she needs men. Gee, Danny! You'll help like everything."

"Maybe. But is it just right to leave—"

"Aw, forget it! I'll be all right."

CHAPTER III

THE CALL

Three months later Red was beginning to entertain some very grave doubts about his being "all right." Contracts were hard to get and harder to keep. England had little interest in a tight wire performer. The entire nation was doing a tight wire act and had become so interested in keeping the balance that they had little time for watching some one do a stunt. Their act was the real thing, on a tremendous scale, and with no safety net under them should they slip.

But if Red met discouragement, none of it reflected in his letters to Dan, who for three months had been in training camp and was almost ready, according to his letters, to be sent over to the front. Red wrote only so much as he thought it good for Dan to know.

The short three months of association with the English, whom Red at first could not wholly understand, had unconsciously developed in him one of their finest attributes. They "carried on." Bur-

dens, sorrow, distress, all were borne without complaint. If hurt, they hid the wound and became a little more determined. Red was beginning to understand them, and admire them. They were like his own tribe. They always went on with the act, a thing which every aerial performer had drilled into him from the beginning. Sickness, headaches, troubles, all must be hidden behind a smile when the hour comes for the act.

Red had taken up a modest little apartment in London with a Mrs. Strawn, widow, who had lost her only son in the war. She was glad enough to have a boarder to help eke out a livelihood that was becoming more and more uncertain. Also, she bestowed upon Red that warmth of mother love that she could no longer give to her son. Then, too, Mrs. Strawn was decidedly Irish, and it was no trouble for her to warm to a McGee. And him red-headed! And but a bit of a boy, without mother and father, alone in the world. Indeed she would mother him.

Mrs. Strawn, though of Irish blood, had picked up an amazing amount of Cockney English. This, in moments of excitement, highly flavored her own dialect. Red soon learned that whenever the widow Strawn stood before him with arms akimbo, her hands resting on bounteous hips, he was about to

be treated to a flow of words as mixed as were the tongues at Babel.

When the postman brought mail from Dan, she always stood around until it was read aloud. "And why shouldn't a letter frum me bye, who I'm lovin' as much as me own, be read to me?" she questioned one day when Red had remained silent over long when finishing a letter that had just been brought and which had been long in coming. "Schure, and I'm waggin' me tongue 'arf out with tellin' the nighborrs phwat a brrave lad he is and how cor-aghews and brrave is the bit uv a red-headed tike what he left behint in me own care. Read it aloud to me, ye young haythen! Have ye no hearrt fer a mither who would be receivin' letters from her own blood if 'twere not fer thim bloomin' blarsted Huns what got mad at Hengland and 'as halready kilt miny and miny an Irish lad who got into theirr bloody schrrap fer no rayson at all save that there was a foine fight goin' on?"

Red looked up from his letter, his eyes alight. "Gee! He's in France," he said.

"Phwat? So soon? Holy Mither! They sind 'em over before the byes 'ave arf a chanct to know they're in the harmy. Now there was me own bye, him that was christened with the same nime of your own brither—and that's why it's loike hearin' frum him to have you rade me his lettherrs—phwat di'

thim English do but give him a gun and a bit uv talk and sind him along to help sthop a horrde of divils phwat had been trained fer killin' frum the day their mithers took 'em out of rompers? And him nivver in a fight except a dozen or two 'e 'ad with his two fists or a bit uv a club. I remimber the day he laid out that pig-eyed bye that was twict his size—" she halted and wiped a tear from her eye with the hem of her apron—"yes," fiercely, "twict 'is size 'e was, and comin' at 'im with a knife—but here, you young sphalpeen, you'll be listenin' to me all the morrnin' and not radein' the letthers. Phwat does 'e say? Ivery word of it, now, and no skippin'."

"'Dear Bud,' " Red began. "'You'll be surprised to hear from me "Somewhere in France." I wanted to write you before leaving, but everything is censored. You know how it is—everybody knows what's going on except the folks back home. We're quartered in a little village about forty kilometers from the front. The village is called—" Red hesitated, and then said, "Someone has rubbed out the name of the town."

"And bad luck to him for it," growled the widow. "'Twas ivver the way they done with me own Danny. All they left in his lettherrs was the 'thes,' 'ands,' and 'buts.' It made no sinse a-tall. And I'll ask you how fur is a kiloometer?"

"I'm not sure," Red answered. "About a mile, maybe."

"That clost to the inimy? Forty miles! Holy Mither! Go on."

"There is a squadron of the air force located here," Red continued the letter. "We expect to be moved up in a few days. An enemy plane came over yesterday, flying very high. Then Archie got busy but they gave him no trouble. Then—"

"And who is Archie?" asked Mrs. Strawn.

"It isn't a man," Red answered, suppressing a smile. "He means anti-aircraft artillery. They call 'em 'Archies'."

"Oh! Go on with ye."

"Then a couple of our boys that had been hanging out in a cloud—"

"Our boys! In the clouds!" expostulated Mrs. Strawn. "The loikes uv him! And he expects us to balave—"

"In planes," Red informed her.

"Oh! Go on with the radein'."

"Then a couple of our boys that had been hanging out in a cloud jumped down on him. They got right on his tail and had him smoking in less time than it takes me to tell about it. He came down like a rock."

"Dead?" questioned Mrs. Strawn. "Glorry be!"

“‘It was a two-seater, and we’re still wondering what he was doing over here alone.’”

“Two-seater? Does he mean there was two o’ the rascals?”

“Yes. A pilot and an observer.”

“Thin glory be twict! I wish ’twas ivvery mither’s son o’ thim,” then remembering quickly her own boy, added, “but the pore mithers! The pore byes! Git along. What else does he say?”

“‘It sort of gives you the creeps,’” Red took up the reading, “‘when you see them come down that way. I’ve been thinking that I’d been better off if I’d gone in for flying. All that I learned about balloons might as well have been forgotten. This is an entirely different game. The only advantage I have over the other boys is that I won’t mind the jumping if I have to. These chutes are much smaller than my old one, and come down quicker. That’s to get you out of the air as quick as possible. The chutes are packed in a bag, or envelope, on the basket, and you put on the harness the minute you step in the basket.’”

“Wait a minute!” demanded the widow. “I’m makin’ nayther heads nor tails uv it. The only things I want to know they cut out of the lettherrs, and phwat they lave in I can’t understand. Tell me, now—”

“Just wait a minute,” Red urged. “I’ll read the

letter first and then I'll explain all I know. He says, 'You put on the harness the minute you step in the basket. That's so you won't forget. They tell a story of a British Major who was forever lecturing his men on this very point. Sometimes he talked pretty rough. Then one day he went aloft without putting on the harness. A Hun plane jumped down on his bag and started spraying it with tracer bullets. The Major jumped. There's no time to lose at a time like that. You've got to be ready. He thought he was. But he had forgotten the harness. Gee, Kid! Just imagine what his thoughts must have been when he suddenly remembered that the old chute wasn't trailing him.' "

"Oh, my Lord A'mighty!" wailed Mrs. Strawn. "And what did the poor man do then?"

With never a smile Red looked the distracted lady fair in the face and said, "He went back after his 'chute."

"Praise be! I'll wager he kapes a civil tongue in his head for his byes from now on. What else does he say?"

"That's about all—except some personal matters. How old was your boy when he went in, Mother?"

"Turned nineteen, he was, and a foiner lad nivver walked the earth."

"Small, wasn't he?"

"Nayther so small as yourself nor as large as

your own brither. He was what ye might call betwixt and between, and the image of his faytherr, God rist his soul." Again patting back the tears with the hem of her apron, the poor woman turned to her housework.

As the days passed a new idea came into Red's mind and it would not down. Everywhere he went he saw troops. Many of these soldiers, it seemed to him, were but little older than himself. Of course it was their war. It was their liberty that was at stake, but Dan's participation was somehow beginning to make it a more personal matter.

Red tried to shake the disturbing idea from his mind with the thought that he was an American by birth. But American or no, he was alive to the thrill of adventure. These troops, swinging so rhythmically along the streets, were marching out to a great adventure. They were leaving the commonplace everyday walks of life and going into the unknown. That fact alone was the contagious, feverish toxin that had flamed in the heart of many a youth and had sent him marching to war with never a thought of what it held. It was all a matter of flags, parades, enthusiasm and great adventure. And it fired Red, just as it was firing the native youths of the land.

But he had no desire to get into ground units. It was the air for him, just as with Danny, save

that his interest ran to planes. There was the real adventure.

One day he walked boldly into a recruiting office and announced his desire to become a pilot.

"American, aren't you?" asked the kindly disposed officer in charge.

"Yes, sir," Red answered, wondering how this man had been able to spot him so quickly. "But my parents were English," he added.

"How old are you?" There was the dreaded question. What had age to do with it, especially since he had been making his own living for years? But he told the truth, and the truth defeated him. Somewhat provoked, and a little more determined, he went back home, where he found a letter from Dan awaiting him. It was short, but it was full of color. A certain section of it was particularly thrilling.

"Yesterday I made two jumps in one day," the letter ran. "We had moved up during the night and at dawn my balloon went up for observation. It was tricky business. A good many clouds were hanging around, and clouds are good hiding places. The winchman had paid out about five hundred feet when an Albatross jumped down on me. I didn't see him, but the man at the 'phone yelled 'jump' and believe me, I went over. The German fired the bag with his first burst. That's close.

Then a couple of our boys, flying Vickers, took in after him and he streaked it for home. He was too fast for them. An hour later I was up again. Everything seemed jake this time, but it didn't last long. Two more of those hornets came down on me and I had to jump again. I offered to go up the third time but the Major said that two jumps in a day were enough for any man. I told him that I didn't mind the jumps and that being shot down was nothing new to me because I used to be shot out of a cannon six days a week. He just blinked a minute, twirled his swagger stick and said, 'Really? Bah Jove, you Yanks can tell some tall tales.' They all call me Yank, and it does no good for me to argue that I'm English. They're a funny bunch of blokes, but I guess you're finding that out. But they've got the sand, all right. More to-morrow. Now be careful, you little shrimp, even if you are all right. Fortunately, every time I get to worrying about you I seem to hear you say, 'Aw, forget it. I'll be all right.'

Love, Dan."

Two jumps in one day! And Dan making light of it. Of course it was true that making a parachute jump was nothing new to him, but jumping from a free bag, with a big 'chute that would let you down soft as a feather, was quite different from going over the side of a basket while an enemy air-

man sprayed machine gun bullets in your direction. It gave Red a thrill, but it also gave him greater proof that the life of a balloon observer was not a bed of roses. Being let out on a cable, crouching in the basket of a plunging, pitching bag, unable to manoeuvre or get out of a zone of fire except by jumping—well, there were safer ways to serve a cause.

One day Red went out to Hampstead Heath to watch some of the London batteries in training. On the way he saw many guns, trucks and caissons lumbering along the streets. Uniformed soldiers were everywhere; men on crutches or with empty sleeves brought forcefully home the sufferings of war, and the long casualty records in the daily papers, fearfully scanned by everyone who had a loved one at the front, gave the daily record of the homes plunged into sorrow. War was in the land, demanding all, taking all, and promising nothing unless all be given.

The greens in Hampstead Heath, once a place to delight the eye, had been ravaged by mimic warfare. Lovely greens had been given over to trenches and gun emplacements. As Red watched the soldiers at their drills he became all the more convinced that little of the spectacular had been left in ground warfare. Men became human moles, burrowing in the ground, or marching like automata and responding only to the sharp commands of

a belted officer. It was mass movement, with nothing left to the individual.

Now he could understand why Dan had insisted upon going into the balloon corps. Fancy a Barstow ever giving up his right to star as an individual! Red was a showman, born to it, schooled to it. Stardom or nothing—that was a Barstow.

That afternoon, as he returned home, he resolved that should America ever come into the war (and there was some talk now of the possibility), he would seek service in the air. No burrowing in the ground for him. No marching and counter-marching under shouted commands. He would take up the gauge of battle where personal initiative, alertness and resourcefulness would mark the difference between victory and defeat.

So thinking he reached home to be met at the doorway by Mrs. Strawn, her eyes red from weeping. At sight of Red fresh rivulets of tears streamed down her face. Her apron hem was no longer effective. It failed utterly to stem the flood of tears.

“Why, Mother! What’s the matter?” Red asked, patting her on the shoulder in an awkward effort to soothe her.

“Oh!” she wailed, “’Tis loike the killin’ of me own son. Me poor bye, me poor bye. Have ye not seen the paper?”

"No. What paper? What do you mean?"

Timidly, reluctantly, she handed him a paper which she had been concealing under her apron and pointed to the black-faced type of the casualty report. Her trembling finger pointed out a name. For a moment Red saw it, and then everything seemed to fade before him. Danny was dead!

Stunned, inarticulate, he sank down upon the doorstep, unconscious of the presence of the widow Strawn, who continued to wring her hands and wail dolorously.

City streets faded. Every tangible thing made way for the march of memory. A rasping voiced barker was shouting, "The peerless dare-devil of the air, that nerveless companion to the birds, Professor Daniel Barstow—"

Companion to the birds no longer! Never again would the smooth tongued barker extol the courage of Danny Barstow. Death had come, in some fashion which Red could not know. But he did know that it had found Danny with unshaken nerves and with the same old high courage. Probably there was not even a cross to mark the place of the bravest of the Barstows. From the twenty-four page posters of last year he was reduced to a single line in a long list of lines. Equal at last with the crowd.

Somehow this seemed a comforting thought.

Danny's courage had been equal to that of any man—he had given all that could be demanded.

Silently, dry-eyed, Red arose and passed into the house, going directly to his room. For a while he busied himself over Dan's old circus trunk, selecting some of the press clippings and one of the posters which Dan had brought along. There was a fixed, determined look in his eyes. It was England's war no longer. It was *his* war, and he would show them that The Flying Barstows had to be accounted for—even to the last.

CHAPTER IV

GROUND SCHOOL

Two conflicting urges actuated Red in his efforts to get the Royal Flying Corps to accept him as a cadet. One was the feeling that Dan's life had been ended all too soon for him to render the full measure of service which he had been so anxious to give. It was an unfinished work that must be completed, else the sacrifice had been in vain. Would not a man, fallen in the conflict, expect his blood brother to take up the gauge of battle? This question had presented itself to Red in the first hour of his sorrow, at a time when thoughts were strangely misshapen and emotions engulfed in a flood of tears. It had but one answer.

The other urge, equally strong and closely akin, was a straight out matter of vengeance. Until this hour it had seemed that the war was a matter between nations. But somewhere in France a German pilot had plunged down on a kite balloon, spewing incendiary bullets from his machine gun. The big bag, filled with highly inflammable hydrogen gas,

had crumpled earthward, trailed by a cloud of smoke and carrying to death the last but one of The Flying Barstows. A single tragic event in a deluge of tragedy, but it had made the war an intensely personal matter to Red.

He was shrewd enough to know that the Royal Flying Corps had little time for men with a grudge. Theirs was a grim, determined purpose. Vengeance, even when coupled with the ideal of carrying on the work undertaken by another, did not necessarily qualify a man for the air.

Realizing this, Red armed himself with some old newspaper clippings reciting the bravery of "the peerless dare-devil of the air," and dragged from his trunk one of the big posters which in flamboyant colors pictured this same "dare-devil" in one of his "death defying" leaps. With no more than a brief farewell to Mrs. Strawn, he set out for Hampstead, determined that since he must carry on his brother's work he would assume his brother's name. Henceforth he would be Daniel McGee.

The ruse was intended to block questions concerning age. He knew that his size would be against him. He might be too small to pass the requirements as to height and weight. These clippings and posters had been used by Dan to good advantage. They testified to his experience.

As Red approached the building in Hampstead

where many an English lad of no greater years had presented himself for service, he offered a prayer that the same clippings would again serve in good cause.

A kindly Scotch Major Doctor, with a most engaging burr in his voice, conducted the physical examination of all would-be cadets presenting themselves at the old building in Hampstead as candidates for wings in the R. F. C.

Passing the first barrier—a barrage of questions—Red soon discovered that while the R. F. C. seemingly sought men (or better say youths), it had instituted a staggering number of hurdles calculated to bring anyone a cropper who was not favored of the gods. The Spanish Inquisition, in the height of its iniquity, never dreamed of as many ways to discover a man's weakness.

Into a great room Red was led and ordered to strip. Innocent of clothing, he faced the doctors who began an immediate search for some reason why he should go no farther. They weighed him, measured him, and cast significant glances at each other. They commanded him to jump up and down, race around the room, and then listened to his breathing, examined his pulse and without comment made notations on a sheet of paper. They looked down his throat, up his nostrils, poked in his ears—

nothing escaped them. Privacy was a word unknown in the examining room at Hampstead.

All this was but a beginning. Candidates for the air service must have perfect lungs, heart, eyes; ears and body. In addition, they must have absolute control of nerves and a sense of balance far above that of the average individual.

Next they seated Red in a revolving chair and pointed out a line painted on the floor. They explained that they would revolve the chair rapidly, stop it suddenly, and at the command he was to spring from the chair and walk that line.

Red smiled to himself. What a test to give a tight wire walker! It would be as easy as walking a board. A question of balance, eh? Well, he knew something of balance.

The chair spun violently. The square walls of the room became a revolving cylindrical cage. Abruptly the spinning ceased and someone shouted, "Now!"

He walked that line as a wire walker should. It was merely a matter of entertaining the crowd. Exultantly he reached the end and turned. Let them bring on their tricks, if they were all as easy as that.

Next they led him into a dark room where eye specialists had designed devilish devices to prove that he couldn't see—or if he could see, at least not well or straight. There were little holes in groups, in pairs, and varying in size and outline. There

were pin points of light. There were charts of letters, and whirling cards with black lines running in crazy circles.

But he could see, and he proved it.

For an hour longer they put him to every test which the cunning of man could devise. Sudden sounds behind his back did not startle him. He was given objects to hold out at arm's length while the observers watched for the slightest tremor. They were severe tests, but he passed them all.

Again they led him back before the medical examiners so that they could note his respiration, his heart action and his blood pressure.

"Aye, the lad's fit," the kindly Scotch Major at last announced and Red felt his chest bulge a little at the sound of those magic words. "But ye are a wee lad," the Major placed his hand on Red's shoulder. "How does it happen that ye ha' nae grown up?"

"I guess I have been too busy," Red answered, marveling that he had found tongue.

A stiff-necked sergeant, conscious of his position and his duty to all new recruits, came at the Major's call and led Red away to equip him.

"Did I pass—sure?" Red asked.

"You've passed *so far*," the sergeant answered, with great emphasis on the last words. "But there's many a hurdle ahead of you. Be sure of that."

"They don't want men badly, do they?"

"They do," said the sergeant. "But you've got to be a man to get in."

"When do I start flying?" Red asked, innocently voicing the question that came to every cadet immediately upon passing the preliminary tests.

The sergeant seemed shocked. It was time to spread light in dark places.

"You haven't *started* yet," he answered. "You'll go down to Hastings to Cadet Brigade Headquarters. There you'll get two months of drilling and discipline—and then—"

"Two months? Of just drilling? But I—"

"Two months," the sergeant interrupted unfeelingly. "You may get through there—and you may not. If you do, then up to Oxford to the School of Aeronautics. There's many a chance for a wash-out there. But if you make it, then to the Armament School. It's a pity the number that never get past that. But don't get the wind up. You may make it. If you do, then comes the School of Flight and your chance to solo. Some of them land with their nose in the ground, others make a beautiful landing—a hundred feet too high—and some get through. If you are good you may get a chance to go to Gosport for acrobatics and—"

"Acrobatics!" Red echoed. "My family have all

been—" he checked himself abruptly. He felt foolish and embarrassed.

The sergeant waited. "Go on," he urged. "I'm simply dying to hear about your family."

"Nothing," Red said.

"Just write and tell your family good-bye when you start acrobatics," the sergeant advised, "for if you get through acrobatics, then you get the big test."

"The big test? What's that?"

"The War School—over the lines in France. And if you get by that you're the world's eighth wonder. But cheer up, lad, you've no troubles now. Food, clothing and a place to sleep and one shilling six pence per day is quite enough for anyone who knows no more than you do. Here, try on this pair of khaki shorts for size."

* * * * *

Cadet Brigade Headquarters was under the command of a Canadian who was a Brigadier General at the age of twenty-eight. Brigadier before thirty! Only in the air could such a thing happen, for the air took youth at its best, judged only on performances and snapped its fingers at old proverbs about the wisdom of age. What does an eagle need with wisdom? Instinct, sure and certain, coupled with a strong body and high courage—these are the re-

quirements of those who quit the bondage of earth and companion with birds.

This officer, despite his youth, knew what lay ahead of the laughing boys who came to him for the first steps in training. There would be trying days that would test a man's steel. There would be swift moments when only resolute courage could bring forth a victor. There would be weary weeks of technical training that would dim the vision of a resplendent pair of silvered wings. Then only discipline could carry the cadet through.

The cadets came to Brigade Headquarters with their eyes on the clouds, but that youthful Brigadier kept their feet on the ground and taught them the fundamentals of being a soldier. A disciplined soldier first, obedient to command and unfaltering under the whip and spur of duty—these were the things he implanted in them during the two months of their training there. If they broke under the strain, if they failed to carry through with the spirit of one who meets a sporting proposition and tackles it fairly, then they were not fit subjects for the air and the service would be saved much by an early discovery of that fact.

Red fretted under the delay, but he played the game. Nearly all of the cadets were boys not yet out of their teens. Here and there was a man of twenty-five or thirty, but it was a rare thing and

that man could count himself an exceptional specimen. Only youth could stand the strain.

At first Red formed no close friendships. He found it difficult to get the British point of view in all matters. He admired them, admitted their many virtues, but his had been a lonely youth, separated from boys of his age, and it was not easy to break down the reserve that had been built up through lack of contact.

But at the end of the first two weeks he formed a friendship with another American that was destined to ripen into a deep and appreciative understanding. Hal Larkin, nicknamed Buzz, was of wealthy American parentage. He never offered any explanation of how he chanced to come over to join the R. F. C., and Red asked no questions. They spent hours together, discussing everything except themselves. Somehow that was a closed book, a subject not to be brought up. This was not only true of them but of all military men. A man came into the service with no need of antecedents. He stood for what he was. He was accepted at face value. It was up to him to increase his value by performance. So long as he lived up to the mark, no one seemed the least interested in family background or past history. The service was a great machine, far too complex to be concerned with anything except the individual and his present job.

Both boys being American, it was natural that they should gravitate toward each other. And being boys, they dealt only in the present, which they found thrilling enough to hold their attention. The present to live, the future to dream of, and the past to take care of itself. It was a day of NOW. All bridges were burned behind and no bridges were crossed before they were reached.

Besides, if one wanted to look for reasons as to why an American should be in the R. F. C., he need look no farther than the fact that it was the air service. What higher adventure had the world to offer? America had not yet begun to buckle on her sword with clumsy, untrained fingers. Until she did, small wonder that some of her youths went out to seek the enemy under the uniform of a nation speaking a common tongue.

By the end of the first month at Cadet Brigade Headquarters Red and Buzz had become inseparable companions. Something that Red let slip gave away the old nicknames which Dan had used. Thenceforth Hal Larkin always called him Shrimp or Red. Occasionally he called him "the Little Shrimp." And Larkin lost his own name, so far as Red was concerned, and became "Buzz." Such things are sure evidences of friendship.

They slept together, hoped and feared together, and spurred each other on. If one showed signs

of breaking, the other came forward with humor or with the lash—whichever seemed best suited to the need of the occasion. They must pass this school! Nothing else was of any consequence. The School of Aeronautics came next. There they would get their first chance to study engines and aeronautics. The dreary round of drilling was irksome; watchful eyes were everywhere; the stiff-backed spectre of discipline walked every parade ground; the prefect in their quarters was all-seeing even though no older than the members of his group; but what matter? How cheap the price for a pair of silvered wings!

* * * * *

Oxford University has long held a proud place in England's program of higher education. She is steeped in tradition; she is rich in records of accomplishment. In peace time this proud old University prepared young men for life. Now, in war, she took within her ancient walls the School of Aeronautics and was stoutly training the youth of the land for War—and for Death!

Once serious minded young men came here to prepare themselves for a long and useful career. Now the walls and grounds resounded with the merry jest and shout of laughing boys who were preparing for service—and never mind the length of it. It would not be long, perhaps, as men meas-

ure time, but it would be brilliant. Could it be that those old walls, which had sheltered so many who came in search of knowledge, now realized that their life and the life of a nation depended upon these young men who were now giving thought only to the problems of aeronautics?

Once the light had streamed through stained glass windows to fall upon classes listening to the voices of black-robed dons who expounded theories of philosophy, propounded problems in higher mathematics and recited the histories of the races of mankind.

Now these same classrooms were filled with boys clad in khaki shorts, wrapped puttees and belted blouses, listening with eager intentness to lectures on drift, wind resistance, compass variations, power ratios, engine types, and the thousand and one things that go into the training of a fighting pilot.

Out behind one of the colleges was a building where airplane motors thundered all day long. Embryo pilots sat in cockpits behind those motors, turning them up to maximum speed, listening to them, attuning their ears to detect the slightest trouble, advancing throttles until the motors took on a sound that could be duplicated only by an angered giant ripping to shreds a mammoth bolt of silk.

Again and again these same cadets took those

motors apart piece by piece, studied them, learned their functions, reassembled them and again gave them a full throttle.

What strange pursuits for men at Oxford!

Here Red and Buzz came for six weeks of training. Gone were the trying days of Cadet Brigade. Another barrier had been made; they were one step nearer the goal. Pass this school, they urged each other, and the rest would be easy.

It was but the optimism of youth. They had yet to learn that the last test of a war pilot is the hardest one. The last test comes only when he fails. The last test, therefore, is never passed.

* * * * *

After aeronautics at Oxford came the Armament School. Here Red and Buzz came with boundless, eager enthusiasm. Armament! It was a word of war. Here they would learn gunnery and bombing. Both had passed the School of Aeronautics with fine records. A spirit of competition had sprung up between them and they went into the school of gunnery with a determination that boded evil for any enemy who gave less thought to the importance of straight shooting.

"This is the game!" Red said to Buzz one day when out on the machine gun range. "If I had to choose I'd rather be a good shot than a good pilot. What's the good of fancy manoeuvring if you miss

when you have your chance? You may never get another."

"Oh, I dunno," said Buzz, who somehow was not making as great progress in gunnery as was Red. "You're the cock of the walk in this school with the Vickers, but wait until we get to the Flying School. A good pilot can lick a good shot any day."

The old argument was on—superior aerial acrobatics *versus* superior marksmanship. Its answer was as easily found as the solution to the old question of which came first, the hen or the egg.

Aerial gunnery presents many a nice problem. It is not a question of shooting at a target moving straight away. The target is plunging and diving, while the gunner too is moving swiftly. Here at last they came to the game of the bead and the ring. A miniature plane crosses a circle at an unexpected angle. There now! Center him! Only a moment to get the sights on and he is difficult to follow. Only hits score. A miss is of no value, for an enemy airman can stand any number of misses.

The bead and the ring game is a nice puzzle. Its successful solution carries a high prize. If you solve it, you live. If you fail—then only superior flying will bring you home again.

The cadets sat at their guns in target practice

dressed in leather coats, helmets, goggles and gloves. They must get used to firing under the same conditions that will confront them in actual battle.

Armament school is not easy to pass. One must be something more than a good marksman. Guns must be mastered. A machine gun, by reason of being automatic, is subject to failure. Malfunctions and jams are frequent. A pilot must be able to clear them quickly, for the time may come when he will be forced to work on a gun jam and at the same time do the best bit of flying he ever did in his life. His attention cannot be riveted on the gun and he must therefore learn to assemble the piece by feel alone.

Other interesting hours were spent in bombing classes. Sitting in a gallery, the student flyer sees below him an unrolling panorama of country. Actually it was nothing more than a strip of painted canvas on rollers. But it was well done, and the proportion was so accurate that one with the least imagination could fancy himself looking from a cockpit down upon the earth. Towns, rivers, bridges, fortifications, and even reproduction of a certain sector of the trenches, rolled beneath the watching cadet.

The instructor orders the cadet to bomb a certain fortification or a bridge. The cadet touches the bomb release at what he thinks is the proper

moment. A light flashes underneath the canvas, indicating the spot where the bomb fell. A miss—by a mile! The cadet frowns and feels foolish. He was so sure of a hit. But it is by the misses that he learns to hit the target. It is not a matter of being directly over an object when the bomb is released. That missile of death does not fall in a straight line. There is deflection to be considered and rightly judged. Altitude and speed of the plane must be considered.

Red thought he knew a great deal about the arc of a falling object. Countless times he had stood poised upon the little platform at the top of a sixty-foot tower, studying the distance and the proper arc. To misjudge the distance and the arc of flight meant serious injury if not death.

That experience stood him in good stead now. He made a surprising number of hits on the unrolling canvas scenery. One day an instructor remarked to another that McGee would make a good night bomber. Thereafter Red never made a hit. He exercised great care to see that he made misses. He had come into the game with the purpose of becoming the pilot of a scout plane and had no desire to go winging out on dark nights, bound for some enemy position with a cargo of high explosive "eggs." From that day on Buzz had no trouble in excelling him in bombing practice.

As the days sped by at Armament School both Red and Buzz realized that here was a place where one loafed at the risk of his own neck. All the courses were designed to make him an efficient fighting machine once he came in contact with the enemy. In that swift, hot moment a man could not know too much and he must function almost automatically.

There were no dull hours here. For instance, there was the wizardry of a machine gun that was so synchronized with the propeller (by means of a gear) that the gunner could fire through the propeller while it was doing two thousand revolutions per minute and never touch a blade! By means of this mechanism, a marvelous device which man had thought out for the slaying of man, the Vickers gun directly in front of the pilot's face could be brought into swift action by the simple expedient of pointing the nose of the plane at the adversary. The target could be centered by manoeuvring the plane. Back a little on the joy stick, the nose lifts, and the gun is on. Or if too high, over with the stick, ever so little, and the streaming tell-tale tracer bullets give all that is needed to know about the line of fire.

Then there was the moving picture theatre, located within the grounds of the school. Its purpose was to entertain and instruct in a grim manner never imagined by the obscure genius who first dreamed of moving pictures. Across the screen flashed plane

after plane, looping, twisting, diving. Never a minute of flying straight away. Here the novice was presented with ocular evidence of the errors in banking; here, too, at the old game of the ring and the bead, he learned how difficult it is to keep gun sights on an enemy skilled in manoeuvring.

Time did not hang heavily at the Armament School. A few days more now, and if all went well then off to Flight School. There must be no slip-ups now. One more hurdle, and the earth was for earthlings and the air for those who had earned the right to a larger freedom.

* * * * *

Flying School at last! Here, in the great hangars, were planes and planes and planes. Nearly every type that England had produced was represented, from the old obsolete ones that had bravely gone out in the first year of the war (and how any pilot ever had the nerve to fly them will ever be a mystery), down to the high-powered, sleek little scouts that could go up like an elevator, zooming until they appeared to be hanging by their props.

Red and Buzz came to Flying School with their hearts in their mouths and their gaze bent upward until their necks ached. The sky was flecked with darting man-made swallows. Toiling, perspiring mechanics, forever at work on cracked-up planes, in

no way dampened the ardor of the cadets who had waited for this great day.

How much there was to see! And how many different type planes for inspection. There were two unstable old Farmans squatting on the tarmac, so covered with wires and braces that they looked more like bird cages than planes. There were tricky old B. E. 2's; Vickers single-seaters; old Avros; the sleek little French Spads with their ridiculously small wing spread and powerful motors that hurtled the little planes through the air at amazing speed. Old Avros and slow D. H. 6's in no way excited the interest of the cadet who had once laid his eyes on a fast climbing Spad or Nieuport, or better still, one of the tiny little S. E. 5's just being tried out but not yet in mass production. It was a plane that resembled a dragon fly when perched on the tarmac and held that resemblance when launched into flight. Speedy, beautiful in every line, it seemed but little more than a toy. Every cadet wanted one at once.

Here was Paradise! And it were Heaven itself when one finished dual flying and sufficient hours of solo to at last be trusted with a single-seater scout.

CHAPTER V

SOLO

"Hey, Shrimp! Wake up! Gonna sleep all day?"

Red opened one eye sleepily. Buzz Larkin stood over him, tugging at the covers.

"Whassa matter?" Red asked and tried vainly to pull the heavy blanket back over his bare legs.

"What's the matter!" Buzz exploded as he gave the blanket a jerk that completely uncovered the protesting Red. "Say, what do you think this is? A hotel? Wake up, you little Shrimp, and help win the war. Don't you know this is your morning for solo?"

Solo! At sound of the word Red came wide awake and swung his bare feet to the floor. It was the day of days. For weeks and months all the tedium and vexation of training had been endured in order to reach the hour when he would go up for his first flight alone. All the tests and trials had been passed. Many of them, it seemed, were calculated not only to try his fitness but to

discover some reason why he should be excluded from the air service. Those hazards were now behind, but not until he had made his solo could he count himself a flyer. Doubtless all that had gone before had been necessary, but despite all such preliminary training he was still an earth-bound creature. Now the real test had come. Soon he would be entitled to the coveted silver wings and a commission to lift him from his cadetship, or failing—

“Get a move on!” Buzz snapped him into action. “Gonna sit there all day looking blank? You’ve got about thirty minutes to get over to the ’drome. Suppose you’d like to have me serve you with a cup of tea in bed, eh?”

“No, I wouldn’t,” Red grouched as he began dressing. “I’m fed up with tea. These Limeys can’t think of anything but tea. Gee! Wouldn’t you like to have a cup of real coffee—a *la* U. S. A.?”

“Toddle along,” Buzz answered. “I put all that behind me when I came over to horn in on this fracas. Coffee, you say? I don’t seem to remember it. And did I hear you mention ham and eggs? Vulgarisms, my boy, vulgarisms. Snap out of it! This is Merry Old England—and you’ll catch Merry Hallelujah if you’re late. Wars must be conducted on schedule, Shrimp. Some men even have the hard luck to get killed before breakfast. Ugh!

That's the trouble with war. It isn't conducted with the proper amount of consideration."

Red laughed. "Just how would you run a war?" he asked. "State your plans. If they sound reasonable I may join your army."

Buzz took a half crown from his pocket and screwing it into his eye as a monocle, mimicked:

"Bawth tubs in the trenches for every soldier and breakfast before being sent over the top, old deah! Fawncy a beggar being sent out to get killed before having his bawth and a bit of tea. It's rawther thick, what?"

"Where did you get the money?" Red asked, observing the half crown. "You were stony broke yesterday."

"A nice fat check from Dad. I wrote him that I'd rather have money in my pocket now than lilies in my hand a little later. He saw the point and relented. He has been sore as a bear ever since I came over here, but Mother writes that he is getting a bit chesty now that I am getting near a pair of wings. She says you'd think I was the ace of aces to hear him tell it."

"Just why did you horn in on this?" Red asked, halting in the lacing of his shoes and looking up at Buzz.

"Tell me why you are here and you have the answer."

Red shook his head. "No, I don't think so. I've a mighty good reason—a sort of personal one. But you—why, you probably had to run away from home to get here. Your parents are Americans. Mine were English, you know. How old are you, Buzz? Honor bright."

"Old enough to know that you've got twenty minutes to finish dressing and get over to that bunch of junk they call a plane. Hump yourself! This is no time for swapping fat. And remember, don't try to take her off on a dime and climb too fast. She'll stall* on you if you do. You've got plenty of room and you can't show these old pilots any new tricks. Easy does it. And don't try any tight banks, and don't—"

"Dry up on the don'ts," Red said as he climbed into his leather flying coat and reached for his helmet. "Just how many hours in the air have you had?"

Buzz winced. He was not yet scheduled for his solo.

"Oh, well, go ahead and crack her up if you don't want my expert advice."

"I'll be surprised if I don't push her nose in the dirt," Red said. "It's 'remember this' and 'don't do that' and so on without end. Listen, Buzz. I'm after a pair of those wings—and I'll forget nothing."

"Aren't you the cocky cockalorum! Maybe you think you won't! I'll bet a pound to a doughnut that you won't be able to remember your name."

"Crepe hanger!" Red retorted as they passed through the door and started legging it for the field.

A half dozen planes were out on the line and several were already in the air. Lieutenant Forbes, an instructor in acrobatics, was aloft in a Spad doing stunts calculated to stir the imagination of old timers and neophytes alike. Red watched him in envy and admiration. The tiny plane was sitting a little above the rising sun. The sun's rays, filtering through a cloud bank in the east, touched the plane's wings with fingers of fire. It glowed like burnished gold, and once, when the plane did a barrel roll, it seemed a golden autumn leaf caught by a gust of wind and hurled aloft in purposeless flight.

"Boy!" Red exclaimed in understanding appreciation. "Watch that bird do his stuff!"

"Don't get any wild ideas in your head," Buzz told him. "You'll get acrobatics soon enough. You try a trick like that on that old 'flying piano' over there and we'll walk slow behind you. It looks easy, but it isn't. For Heaven's sake, watch your step. You don't want to get washed out on the first trial. That old bus is creaky in the joints, but

she's made many a good pilot. Treat her gentle, brother, treat her gentle."

Red went over the ship in minute inspection. He had been told again and again that only a fool trusts his life to the care of a mechanic.

The plane was an old one—as time is counted in the life of a training plane—and she showed the signs of service. There were patches on her wings. Two new struts, a new prop and a new tail skid all offered silent testimony to the fact that some green cadet had made a perfect landing—fifty feet above the ground.

But to Red she was a thing of beautiful promise. He was to take her up—alone! What mattered a patched wing? It was a magic rug to carry him to better things. Soon he would be zooming aloft in one of these swift little scout planes and tumbling in breath-taking acrobatics.

The motor of Red's plane had already been warmed. As he climbed into the cockpit an instructor began offering some last minute cautions. Red nodded, but for his life he could not have repeated what was said.

The wind, light but steady, was strong enough to belly the wind socks on the top of the hangars. He must taxi to the other end of the field, turn her about—two men would be there to help a clumsy

novice do the trick—and then come down field against the wind.

He nodded to the mechanic who stood ready to whirl the prop. The instructor stepped back.

Whish! Whish! Whish! went the propeller as the mechanic turned her over. Then the prop came down hard against compression.

“Contact!” called the mechanic.

“Contact!” Red repeated, and marveled that his voice sounded so steady.

She caught and roared. Cautiously Red advanced the throttle. The plane moved forward.

Red could not possibly have retold or analyzed his impressions as the plane rolled to the far end of the field. Somehow the turn was made. The helpers looked up at him expectantly. They knew his thoughts. A cadet out to solo was no new thing to them, nor was it of any great concern. Perhaps they did not realize that for the moment all three of them were creatures equipped by nature for stumbling along the hard ways of the earth. Another minute and one of them would take wing. Henceforth that one would be utterly different. Even now he stood poised, like a May fly just emerged from the larva, testing untried wings and waiting for the strength and courage to enter a new kingdom.

Somehow Red's nerveless fingers gave her the

throttle. The plane moved forward slowly. Gaining momentum, it began bumping and lurching. It tried to turn with the prop and leave the line of flight. This was quickly corrected. Now the hangars seemed to be rushing out to meet the plane. The field, twice the length required for this type of plane, seemed all too short.

Ah! She was lifting a little now. No, not yet. Yes—now!

Red gave her the gun and pulled back on the stick. Heavens! He would never make it. That hangar was fairly leaping at him. He was almost upon it. . . . Miracle of miracles, it was passing beneath. He was in the air at last.

In the air! His plane, under his command!

He looked up and around, spotting the planes that were high above him. He wanted to make sure of their location, for after a collision in the air there is no getting out to walk around and view the damage.

He pulled back a little more on the stick. Higher and higher he climbed, flying straight away. Like every other cadet on solo he dreaded that first turn. He would first get plenty of altitude. The turn,* he determined, would be wide enough to suit any instructor.

But when the time came he was surprised at the ease with which it was accomplished. The plane was

alive, reading his mind, responding to the slightest touch. The wind was steady enough to sweep out the air pockets and the plane rode evenly and without much pitching.

He was back over the field again. He could see Buzz—at least he thought it was Buzz—face turned upward, watching the flight. Funny looking fellow, Buzz, seeming to stand at a crazy angle and dwarfed into a short-legged midget. The hangars were toys; the planes on the line were so many butterflies hovering at the edge of a pool filled with green algae.

These illusions were not novel. He had noted them many times while making flights under the experienced hands of instructors, but they took on an added significance and interest when he realized that the hand on the stick was his own. He was a novice, alone in the air, beyond help or advice and out of his element. Out of his element? Not so. He had worked like a dog to gain it. At last he had wings! The air was his! What matter that he was violating orders? What matter that he had been ordered to go up, make a turn, and land? Had he not slaved for this hour?

He gave her a wider throttle and a little more stick.

At three thousand feet he leveled off and came back over the field. He could no longer identify Buzz. He was like any of the dozen other tiny be-

ings moving slowly about in a circumscribed area. All were as ants, feet glued to the ground, and the great butterflies at the edge of the pool had become little grey bodied wasps.

The world was now a patchwork of crazily fashioned pieces interwoven and held together by stitches made of green hedges and narrow brown ribbons where roadways ran. He was a good three thousand feet, and it seemed but a minute since he had been wondering whether he could do it.

Now to bring her down again. Aye, there was the test. Any one, with a little instruction, can make a fairly creditable take-off, but putting her down again is quite another matter. The difference between pancaking and putting her down like a feather might mark the difference between life and death. In any case the instructor would be furious over the violation of orders. He had ordered a take-off, a turn and a landing, not an altitude flight.

The field now lay a little to the south. He must come down in such fashion as to have the wind against him when he made a landing.* The last bank, at the far end, must be made on a nose tilted downward instead of on a climbing nose. Easy enough—if you did the right thing.

That moment the engine coughed uncertainly, cut in again, halted, sputtered, then stopped suddenly

as though some giant had strangled it with a mighty grip.

Red glanced at the board. No sign there. He looked below. The field was almost beneath him. To the east lay farm land, to the west a large open field completely bordered by a dense wood. He could dive for that but he must calculate to a nicety the height of those trees. There was but one other choice—the flying field, and it was almost directly below. That meant steep spiraling, and he knew only the theory.

Incongruous as it may seem, he suddenly remembered what he had once heard a negro say when witnessing a flight back in the States. An aviator, flying an old plane with the pilot's seat out in front of the engine, was making country fairs and thrilling the yokels with daring loops and spirals. Red and Dan had been playing the same fair and the aviator had grabbed the show that day. No one was interested in a parachute jumper and a high diver.

So, like the "towners," Red and Dan had become interested if somewhat jealous spectators. In the crowd was a large, black, open-mouthed negro, who, at the very moment when the aviator was making a loop, spoke up and said: "Man! What Ah wants to know is wha' do he go if his fan stops?"

Now, with startling suddenness, Red realized that

this same question must always be uppermost in the mind of a pilot. When the prop goes dead a landing field must be selected quickly.

These thoughts had gone through his mind like lightning. There was little time for thinking. Response and action must be almost automatic and they must be correct. There would be no second guess.

Despite the warning of the instructor against tight banks, he decided that the flying field was his best bet.

What were those old principles of aerodynamics which had sounded so dull back there at Oxford? Resistance created by pull of the prop when flying on an even keel must be created by the force of gravity (divine) once the engine became dead. That was the theory of the thing, though it had been stated in terms sufficiently scientific to make it extremely dull and uninteresting. But now, Red realized, it was not lacking in interest. If he kept the nose down just far enough, yet not too far, and ruddered just right, he might make it. Otherwise—well, one hates to have an unsuccessful aerial experiment used as an example in future lectures to aspiring cadets.

Down, down, he went, and round and round. The wind was whistling now. It was good to hear it, for it told that he had enough speed to bring her out if

need be. That whistling wind and the singing wires were delivering a splendid lecture on aerodynamics.

The field seemed to be jumping up to meet him. A little too fast, he reasoned, and eased her a bit.

Now—now if he nosed down a little he would be in just the right position to make the last turn at the far end of the field and come up against the wind. If he misjudged, then he must pancake her down, for there would be no altitude left for a second turn.

As he made that last bank it seemed that one of the wings almost touched the ground, but the ship held the air like she was in a groove. Two seconds later he felt the wheels touch and he put her tail down with a smack.

Crack! There would be a new tail skid needed before the next flight—and a new prop if he didn't keep her tail down.

Jumping, bounding, veering, trying to become unmanageable in the last moment of danger, the plane went lumbering down the field toward the hangars. Pilots, mechanics and instructors went scurrying from her path. Almost on the line she came to a stop.

Buzz came running up, white of face.

"How's that?" Red heard himself asking as he forced a weak smile. "Pretty good dead stick landing?"

"Huh!" Buzz exploded. "That's just putting your faith in God and then handicapping Him. Why in the world didn't you head for the west field?"

"I was afraid I'd misjudge those trees."

"And you chose to spiral? Boy! What do you know about spiraling?"

"I *didn't* know much," Red answered, "but I've learned a lot. It wasn't such a bad job, was it?"

"Naw, not bad—for a little shrimp. Boy, you'll live to get shot down—if you're not grounded for disobeying orders. You were not ordered to make an altitude flight, but to make a turn and land."

"Well," Red said, "I made the landing and threw in the extra turns for good measure."

CHAPTER VI

WAR EAGLES TAKE WING

April came, and with it two commissions in the R. F. C., that lifted Red and Buzz from their cadetships and made them feel that they were inheritors of all the earth. On their uniforms were the coveted silver wings for which they had worked so hard and which had been denied to many of their friends who had started out with them at Cadet Brigade Headquarters. There had been failures all along the line. And some, almost within grasp of the prize, had made some fatal mistake and paid the supreme price for that failure. Zeal and valor unrewarded. Only to the children of Fortune went the glory and the prize.

But it was not the commissions alone that stirred Red and Buzz that second day of April. There was talk that America had reached the breaking point and would soon join forces with the Allies. To these two boys it brought a happy relief from eternally defending their country's dilatory actions. Now, when the break seemed imminent, the English

assumed a different attitude. Hope that the break would come was not openly expressed, but it was secretly nourished.

Then, to add to all this, orders came on the third of April sending the new formed squadron down to the channel coast, where they were to be outfitted with planes and sent across the channel.

On the way down by train Red and Buzz could talk of nothing but the chance that America would enter the war.

"If she comes in, where will we get off, I wonder?" Red asked.

"What do you mean?" Buzz looked at him quizzically.

"Well, if she comes in, she will have to train pilots. It would be just our luck to get sent back home as instructors."

"Forget it! You're in the R. F. C., not the U. S. A."

"I know, but we could be sent back there as instructors just the same."

"Don't worry. In two or three days we'll hop the channel and they will have forgotten all about two Americans who happened to be in the squadron."

"I'm not so sure. They forget nothing. It's a mass of red tape and official record. If you had the measles when a baby, like as not they'll dig it up

on you and make you do something about it. Besides, while I am hoping that nothing like that will happen, I am also hoping that it will."

Buzz looked up quickly. "Yeah? What do you mean?"

"Just this. I'm proud as Punch to be here. I'm proud of this uniform and I'm proud of these wings. But just the same, if America was in, wouldn't you sorta want to have your lot cast with her?"

Buzz nodded. "I understand. Fact is, I've been thinking the same thing but was afraid to mention it."

"Why afraid?"

"Oh, I dunno. A chap is supposed to be loyal to the uniform he wears."

"Certainly. And we are. But you can't change a man's nationality by a uniform. We're not English, Buzz. We're different in every way. We speak the same tongue—and yet, Oh, boy! What a difference in the way we speak it. I thought I was English simply because my father and mother were. But I'm American, through and through. I know that America should be in this war. Down deep, I even think she should have come in a long time ago. And yet, whenever one of these Englishmen make any remarks about it, I immediately spring to the defense. That's nationality. You can change uniforms, but you can't get rid of nationality."

"I suppose not," Buzz agreed. "If she had come in a year ago I wouldn't have had to kick over Dad's little pet apple cart. He had a wonderful career all mapped out for me. University and then into the business. I looked it over, and would you believe it, I couldn't see a single place where there was a ghost of a chance for anything really exciting to happen."

Red laughed. "No chance to get killed, eh? Well, you've wonderful chances now."

* * * * *

The seventh day of April dawned with the glory of a blood red sky. Near a certain channel town where operations and departures were conducted with such secrecy that every one knew all about it, a new squadron of air cavalry had their planes out on the field warming the motors. In a few minutes they would leave in formation, climb to eight or ten thousand feet and wing their way across the channel to the theatre of war. On July 25th, 1909, Louis Bleriot, a Frenchman, had demonstrated to the world that it could be done. With him it was a brave step in the interest of aviation, but it is fitting that a Frenchman should have been the pathfinder for thousands of knights of the air who a few years later would leap that same barrier as they thundered to the defense of France.

Out on the field, as the sun climbed above the red cloud bank, Red was making the final inspection of

his plane. Every brace, every turnbuckle, came in for the minutest inspection.

"Hey, Shrimp! Oh, Shrimp!" It was Buzz, shouting as he ran and waving a paper in his hand.

"Where's the fire?" Red asked as Buzz raced up, panting for breath.

Buzz stabbed his finger at the bold headlines.

"Look here! America has declared war. That's the fire, boy!"

In his excitement he danced around in circles. Red grabbed for the paper.

"Here! Let me see it, will you!"

Warming motors were forgotten. Airmen swarmed around. Everyone wanted the paper at the same time. Everyone wanted to slap the other fellow on the back—and did.

Major Lowe, squadron commander, strode into the group and broke up the celebration with characteristic stoicism.

"Splendid news," he said. "Quite. But they're not over here yet, you know, and we're not yet in France. Carry on, now. Lieutenant McGee, you can read the news in France—to-night. You're jolly well pleased, what?"

"You tell 'em," said Red, forgetting all about rank and courtesy.

The Major did not forget, but being a man of

parts as well as a Major, he merely smiled at the breach.

Thirty minutes later the planes took off in good order, corrected formation and climbed steadily as they neared the coast. The motors hummed with sweet precision. Red knew that his heart and his motor were in tune. War, war, war, war, war! sang the motor with never a miss. Stout-hearted, seeming to feel its responsibility and its purpose, that engine voiced Red's own pean of joy.

There was the coast line below and a little town that at eight thousand feet seemed but a child's toy. Now it passed. Over the water at last. A steamer—another toy—was being tended by a flock of little black water bugs. A channel boat, farther out, was headed shoreward. Perhaps she carried hundreds of soldiers who were again feasting their eyes on England's shore line.

Red glanced across at Buzz, who was flying opposite him on the other wing of the V. Buzz waved. He, too, was singing with his motor.

On a little way and then, for some unknown reason, Red looked back. The shore line was growing dim. He saw the pilot in the plane behind turn his head. The one directly across also turned to look. Was it the last look at English soil for some of them? What impelling force caused every man

to turn, almost at the same moment, for one last look at the dimming April green of England?

On now, faces to the front. England lay behind. France and Belgium and War ahead. And the climbing sun, now two hours high, would be waking America to a new day. She would awake to busy herself with conflict.

War, war, war, war, war! sang the motors, driven by men who wore silvered wings on their blouses. White, silvered wings. Somehow that idea had always been associated with angels. These were not angels. They were the eagles of war and death. . . . Even so, were they not angels if they served to bring peace to a flaming world?

* * * * *

Major Lowe, commanding and leading the flight, nosed his plane down toward a field flanked by hangars a little south and west of Dunkirk. The passage of the channel had been uneventful and every plane made a good landing. They were on French soil at last. War was now a next door neighbor.

That night Red and Buzz sat in their quarters, reading every line of the paper which Red had brought along. It had been the biggest day of their lives and this was the biggest piece of news. It was the topic of conversation wherever two people met. The President's message to Congress, asking them to

declare war, was printed in full. Troops were mobilizing. The nation was arming, and from the tone of one of the editorials one would be led to believe that troops would begin arriving on the next boat.

A knock at the door.

"Come in," Red called.

An orderly entered and saluted. "Major Lowe orders you to report to him at once," he said.

"Both of us?" Red asked.

"Yes, sir. Both."

Red shot a quick glance at Buzz. "What have *you* done?" he asked.

"What have *you* done?" Buzz countered. "Come on. Something's up. Where is Major Lowe quartered?" Buzz asked the orderly.

"Follow me, sir. I'll take you there."

Although most comfortably billeted in a great old house that had been built at a time when no effort was made to conserve space, the Major seemed quite unhappy and disturbed. When Buzz and Red entered he was pacing up and down the length of a large room dimly lighted by candles and somewhat stuffy and musty by reason of having the windows and shutters closed so that no gleam of light might serve as a target for some enemy airman cruising about with a cargo of high explosives and looking for some place to deposit them.

The Major, though quite young, was capable of

displaying temper that would have done credit to a grizzled old French *poilu*. He ignored the salute of the two young officers and continued pacing up and down until at last he paused to kick over a chair and then hold his foot in regret.

"I've a rotten bit of news for you," he said at last. "An order has just come down separating you from this squadron and sending you down to St. Pol."

"St. Pol!" Red echoed. "What's at St. Pol?"

"There is a great deal down there. A flyer's pool, for one thing.

"But why are we being taken away from this squadron?"

"God knows," the Major answered tartly. "This is the second squadron I've had at the front and I have never known from one day to the next just what I could depend on. You may draw your own conclusions. My theory is that you are being taken out for the reason that you are Americans."

"I told you," Red said dourly as he turned to the amazed and speechless Buzz. "Red tape and records. Some record hound found it out. Does that mean no more flying, Major?"

"I don't know. We never look at what is back of an order. You will find out once you get to St. Pol. All I know is that I am bloody well provoked. I'm sorry to lose you."

"Does that mean—must we give up all these

friends we have made? Have we gone through all this training just to—just to lie around in some funny little old town and rot?”

“I did not draw up the order,” the Major replied, “nor can I change it. It’s a bit thick, I will admit. I will say this: Should you by chance meet up with the chap who thought it up, you can bash him over the head—with my compliments.”

CHAPTER VII

RED'S SECRET

St. Pol, in times of peace a small French city of no great fame or importance, had been converted by war and the circumstance of geographical location into a buzzing, bustling, military center. It was a great aviation pool, as well as headquarters for other arms of the service. Supplies were shipped there in great quantities and thence on to the front by rail and lorries as needed. All day long the streets were filled with soldiers and officers; some hurrying along on missions and others loitering in the grand manner known only to a soldier with time on his hands which he can call his own.

The cafes were jammed from morning till night. The shops, tended by old men and young girls, were doing a thriving business. Eastward, at no great distance, the guns were thundering day and night. The Germans, trying to break through, hurled men and explosives against a line that held with grim, unbending determination.

The people of St. Pol seemed to know that the

line would hold. Everywhere there was talk of war, but nowhere was there doubt expressed about the ability of the French and English to hold the line. St. Pol simply went about its business—the business of buying and selling, of receiving supplies and shipping them forward, of quartering a constantly changing stream of military men wearing the uniforms of the English, the French, the Canadian, the Australian, and the picturesque Scotch Highlander.

It was a colorful medley. Shopkeepers and landlords shrugged their shoulders at the sound of strange tongues and steadfastly refused to try to understand. They were French, and the French language was quite good enough. The soldiers, therefore, were compelled to employ a strange tongue. This they did with great gusto. They were not the least disturbed when their poorly formed sentences failed to carry meaning. When words failed they simply got out their money and said, “Combien?” (How much?) This the Frenchmen always understood.

For two or three days Red and Buzz tried to forget their troubles and get as much enjoyment as possible out of the quaint little city. It was great just to be able to loaf. But after a few days of it the activities of the town forced them to realize more fully their own inactivities. Soldier-like, they at once set up a great howl. They had entered the war

to fight, and fight they wanted. Had their ideas of warfare been a little more seasoned, they would have gladly loafed at St. Pol, or any other old place, and thanked the gods for the fortune. But experience and youth are never partners.

They haunted headquarters. They bored the adjutant with the same old questions, repeated daily. How long were they to be kept here? No one knew. Why were they here, anyhow? No one seemed to know. Would they ever fly again, or were they grounded for good and all? Oh, yes, they would fly again, but they must be patient. Would they be sent back to their old squadron? Not likely, but it was impossible to say. They must wait. Orders would come, soon enough, and would they please be good enough to quit asking foolish questions?

For weeks they marked time in St. Pol, waiting for orders that never came. They were given ships to fly, out at one of the fields, and thus kept their hand in, but they were given no promise of better things.

"I tell you, we've been forgotten," Red complained to Buzz one evening as they sat at dinner in one of the cafes. "I'm convinced now that they expect to send us back to America as instructors."

"Want to go?" Buzz asked.

"No. The day America declared war I had some feeling about it, just as we took off for the hop

across the Channel, but I was never so happy as when we landed at that field southwest of Dunkirk. I was right where I wanted to be."

"Why there, particularly?"

Red pushed back his plate and leaned across the table. "I'll tell *you*," he said, "and you are to keep it under your hat. Understand?"

"Sure. Shoot."

"Ever hear me mention a brother?"

"Umm. N-o-o, I think not. I've heard you mention your father and mother. English, you said."

"Yes. And I had a brother, named Dan—"

"Dan!" Buzz exclaimed. "But that's your name. How many Dans did you have in your family?"

Red laughed, but the laugh was devoid of humor.

"That's the secret," he said. "As you know, my mother and father were English. So was my brother. But I was born in America. We made one return trip to England when I was just a kid, and—and—" he hesitated, toying with a napkin, "and Mother and Dad were killed in a fall."

"In a fall?" Buzz echoed. "What do you mean—fall?"

"We were circus people—The Flying Barstows. Ever hear of them?"

Buzz considered. "N-o, I believe not. You mean you were flyers? Say, where do you get that stuff?"

You didn't know a plane from a wheel-barrow when I first met you, and—"

"Just a minute! Flyer doesn't necessarily mean pilot. We were a family of aerial trapeze performers, famous throughout the world," (Red could not suppress the boast and the desire to let Buzz know that there was reason for family pride) "and we were known as The Flying Barstows. Professional name, you know. After the accident, Dan took—"

"Which Dan? You or the other one?"

"Wait a minute, can't you? After the accident Dan took me back to America. At that time fairs and carnivals were hot stuff out among the pumpkin rollers and Dan cleaned up. He was a balloon man and parachute jumper and I learned to do a tight wire act and a high dive. Between us we made an easy living."

"Easy? Oh, boy! You don't know from one day to the next whether you'll live to enjoy your living. Call that easy?" Buzz leaned back and eyed Red for a long minute. "What are you doing, Shrimp? Kidding me?"

"No. It's the truth."

"So you were a high diver? Well, I know now why you are so good at nosing a ship down until the rest of us get heart failure for fear the wings will come off when you straighten out. Go ahead and lie some more. I'm all ears."

"I'll make it snappy. You won't care for the details."

"But I will. No story is ever too long for me if it's half good. You are doing well so far."

"I'm telling you the truth," Red flared.

"Fine! You're going great. I like you best when you get excited and your face gets red enough to hide your freckles. I never knew you were such a good story-teller. Did the two Dashing Dans get killed?"

"One did," Red answered soberly.

Buzz mistook that sobriety for a part of the game.

"Which one?" he asked. "You or the other one?"

Red's eyes narrowed, his thin lips became even thinner and all color left his face.

"Sore?" Buzz asked, after a strained pause. "Can't you stand a little kidding?"

"Yes, but not about this. I'm telling you the truth. You asked for it, and you're getting it. Forget it!"

"I'm sorry, old man. I thought you were joking. Go ahead."

"Then keep quiet. When the war broke out Dan began to get all worked up over it and we came over so he could get in the kite balloon game. He thought he was fitted for that. He was, but they shot him down up in the Ypres salient a few months

after he got over. He's buried up there somewhere, and I want to find out just where. He was all I had." Red choked up, halted for a moment, then collecting himself, said, "That's all there is to it."

For several minutes they sat in silence, Red toying with a spoon and Buzz wondering whether this was the proper time for further questioning. Curiosity got the better of him.

"You say that's all," he said at last, "but it isn't. I'm still wondering how both of you happened to have the same Christian name."

"Old Sherlock!" Red forced a smile. "We didn't *happen* to have the same name until *after* Dan was shot down. Does that mean anything to you?"

Buzz shook his head.

"Then here is how it *happened*. After I got the news of his death I decided to make an effort to get in the flying game. I knew my size was against me and I was afraid they would think I was too young. Then I had a bright idea. If I could show some experience it would be a better asset than size or age. So I dug some press clippings and an old poster out of my trunk and headed for Hampstead. Those clippings and that poster told the world what a whale of a parachute jumper my brother was. I merely became Dan McGee. I had a hard time making them understand that a man

might be a Barstow in public and a McGee in private, but I put it over. The next thing I knew they came very near to sending me off to balloon school. That was a tight box for a little while and I was almost forced to spill the beans. You know the rest."

"What do you know about that!" Buzz exclaimed. "But what if they find it out?"

Red shrugged his shoulders. "What if they do? I'm a pilot now, and they need pilots badly enough. Or maybe they don't," he remembered suddenly, "else we wouldn't be loafing here. Anyway, I'm in, and there must be a great many Dan McGees in the service. One or two more or less won't make any difference. Now that you know all about it, you know why I want to get some flying up in the Ypres salient. I'd give ten years off the other end of my life to bring down my first Hun right in the neighborhood where they got Danny. This war is a sort of personal thing—with me—and I haven't anyone to worry about me. Understand?"

"Yes, I understand."

A long silence followed. Buzz now understood why Red had displayed such tireless energy during the training period. He had gone into the gunnery school with a determination that made him one of the best machine gunners in the entire air force. He had lived combat. Every waking hour had been

devoted to earnest study and application. When other cadets employed ruse to escape some tedium of duty, Red pushed ahead with a stiff-lipped zeal that took no thought of physical strain. Now the reason was evident. It had been, and still was, a matter of vengeance.

"Yes, I understand—now," Buzz repeated, "but you want to remember that the English have spent a lot of money in training you. You can get revenge, all right, but you may get shot down while shooting at the other fellow. If you are just here to get even with somebody, you won't last long. You won't be able to weigh the chances. Besides, it is a question of who should win."

"Yeah, I know all about that. But to win you have to lick the other fellow. If I can get one or two of 'em in the same sector where they shot down my brother it would sort of even the score and it wouldn't hurt our chances for victory."

A British non-com entered the room, stood looking around at the various tables and then came directly over to where Red and Buzz were seated.

"Lieutenant Larkin?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And Lieutenant McGee?" he turned to Red.

"Yes."

"You are to report to Headquarters at once. Orders sending you up to a squadron at the front."

"Both of us?"

"Yes, sir."

"What squadron?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Our old squadron?" Buzz persisted.

"I don't know, sir."

"Mademoiselle!" Buzz shouted for the waitress.

"*L'addition, s'il vous plait. Quick! Here!*"

He glanced hurriedly at the bill and dropped a twenty franc note on the plate.

"Keep the change," he said in English as she trotted after them to the door. "*Un souvenir pour vous, Mademoiselle,*" and then added in English, "with the compliments of two happy pilots, eh, Shrimp?"

"You tell 'em. Come on, let's set the dirt afire."

They reached Headquarters in record time, bounded up the steps and breathlessly saluted the same adjutant whom they had been pestering for the past three weeks.

"Is it our old squadron?" Red asked, too eager and excited to wait for any verification of the non-com's report.

The adjutant lifted his eyebrows in surprise. "No. It's the 16—th, an old squadron with a splendid record. But they are in the same wing with your old one."

"Near Dunkirk?"

"Yes. Transportation will be furnished you tomorrow morning, here, at eight o'clock."

"What are they flying, Captain?" Buzz asked.

"Nieuports, I understand."

Buzz grabbed Red and danced around in a circle. A fig for adjutants and commissioned dignity.

"You are no happier than I," mused the adjutant. "I had much rather look after an entire brigade than two grounded Americans."

"Old lippy!" Buzz grimaced over his shoulder when he and Red were well out of the door. "These birds back here in soft, cushy places give me a pain. I'll bet if he got on a merry-go-round he'd think he was in grave danger. Boy, we're off! Right back where we started from. I hope you're happy now. Just think—Nieuports! And we might have drawn one of those old flying pianos. It's getting so a man doesn't last long in a B. E. We've got the luck."

"Yes," Red agreed, "but why all this mess and delay? First we're in and then we're out and then we're in again with a new squadron and a new commander. How do you figure that?"

"I don't. But I call it luck to be taken off of B. E.'s and put on Nieuports. If we had stayed with the old squadron we would probably be pushing up the daisies by this time. Just thank the gods for all small favors and ask no questions."

CHAPTER VIII

THE DAWN PATROL

The squadron to which Red and Buzz had been assigned was located near Teteghem. For the first few days after reporting there for duty they spent nearly all their time studying sector maps, listening to talks and lectures, trying out their new Nieuports, and praying that the squadron commander would soon send them out on patrol.

On the third day they got permission to fly over to their old squadron for a short visit. It was a visit mixed with joy and sorrow. There were several new faces, drawn from the pool to take the places of Drain, Markham and Fellows. All three of these had been shot down, though Fellows had landed under control behind the enemy lines and was now a prisoner. Burrows and Bond, two old friends, were in the hospital following crack-ups behind their own lines.

What changes had come in three short weeks! As Red flew home near evening he began to realize why pilots measured their time by hours in the air rather

than by actual length of service in total time elapsed. The hours spent on the ground simply did not count.

"Maybe we had a bit of luck in the transfer," Buzz said when they got back to their own 'drome. "The old outfit seems to have some sort of jinx hovering over it. Those old B. E.'s are cold meat for the Hun planes. Besides, I never did like the idea of carrying an observer. This is a good bunch we're with here."

"Yeah," Red agreed, "but they seem to think we don't know anything about flying. I'm fed up on maps and lectures. I want to go out on patrol."

"Aren't you blood-thirsty?" Buzz taunted. "Better let well enough alone. I'm beginning to see that experience is worth a lot. The trouble is that you may get bumped off getting the experience."

They were on a particularly active front. Both sides were striving for air supremacy, with the English having the better of the argument. It was seldom that a German patrol crossed the lines. They made the English come over after them in machines that were vastly inferior in speed and manoeuverability. When the Germans did make occasional sallies across the line they waited until the wind was blowing toward their own lines so that a crippled plane would at least have the favor of the wind in trying to make escape.

Each evening and each morning the squadron sent

out a patrol. Its mission was to cruise up and down between given co-ordinates and keep a sharp lookout for the enemy. Major Minton, youthful squadron commander, had one great passion—air superiority. This meant combat, and if the enemy were not to be found over the lines then he would go back after them.

As the various patrols came back to the 'drome—sometimes as a unit but more often coming in singly and in pairs, having been separated and broken up by a dog fight with the enemy—Red and Buzz could scarcely contain themselves as the men began telling of their encounters. If they came back victors, and all intact, then there would be great rejoicing and excited talk that gave but fragments of the whole story. The pilots had developed a slang, or jargon, that would have been absolutely unintelligible to a non-flyer. Even Red and Buzz found that certain phrases were none too clear but they asked no questions. The stigma of being new to the game was great enough. They would not increase it by the silly questions of a novice.

On the fifth day one of the pilots did not return from the evening patrol. He had been forced down behind the enemy lines and no one had been able to see whether or not he had cracked up.

The conversation at mess that night lacked spontaneity. A good and popular pilot had gone the

way of hundreds of others. Whether in a prison camp or dead, he was none the less lost to his friends and to the service. Another must now take up his burden.

An hour after mess Major Minton sent for Red.

Minton was a mild mannered little man, slow of speech and possessed with but one idea—to make the air in that sector an exceedingly unhealthy place for the enemy. The fact that he was officially credited with fifteen planes was evidence that he knew how to make war unhealthy for those who opposed him.

“Lieutenant McGee,” he said when Red entered his quarters, “you will go out to-morrow morning with the dawn patrol.”

The dawn patrol! At last it had come. Red felt himself tingling all over. His tongue sought words of appreciation and ended with an inane, “Yes, sir.”

“You will report to Lieutenant Barrows, who will command your flight. He will give you the proper instructions as to formation and objective.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I see you have a splendid school record as a gunner,” the Major went on, studying some papers before him which were Red’s personnel records. “You have had sufficient training to make you valuable to this squadron. One word of caution—in all cases, do as you are ordered. Above all, stay in

formation. You may see something that looks like cold meat, but stay in formation until your commander signals attack."

"Yes, sir."

"In all probability," the Major went on, "you will not be able to see a thing. Air eyes have to be developed. As I have said, you can become of value to this squadron. I want you to prove that value by *coming back*. Don't entertain any false notions that superior marksmanship is everything. If you make contact with the enemy, like as not he will be an experienced flyer. If Barrows leads you into a dog fight, pick out your man, dive on him with a burst and cut for home at the first opportunity. But first be sure no one is on your tail."

"You mean—you mean leave the fight?" Red asked, unable to believe his ears.

"Exactly. If you get your man on the first burst, well and good. If not, don't stay around to make good at the job. If you do, some older head will get you—sure."

"But the others? What will they think?"

"They will think, 'There goes a wise lad doing exactly what he was ordered to do on his first patrol.' Listen, McGee. You can get gunnery, acrobatics—everything in training except actual experience. Do as I tell you. Pick out your man, and when you're on, let go. Then tool your ship

for home. Look sharp now that some Hun doesn't see you first. Keep your head on a pivot, you know."

"Yes, sir. What about Lieutenant Larkin? Is he going?"

"Not on this patrol. His time will come."

"Yes, sir."

Red walked back to his billet on air. There was but one thing to mar his happiness. Buzz was not going along. Heretofore they had shared everything and each one always included the other in every plan. As one they had looked forward to the hour when together they would go out on patrol. Red felt sure that Larkin's disappointment would be great.

But he had misjudged the character and quality of Larkin's friendship. Buzz was waiting for him when he came in and sprang forward to grasp his hand.

"I know all about it," he exclaimed in an excited voice. "You're going out on the dawn patrol. Great! Simply great, Shrimp!"

Red looked at him in surprise, then shook his head in a puzzled way.

"But what about you?" he asked.

"Say! Don't worry about me. They don't want two dubs in a flight of five. They have to break

us in one at a time—and they took the best one first.”

“Bushwa!” Red responded, wrinkling his freckled nose. “I’m sorry you’re not going along. In a pinch I’d rather have you close by than any of these older pilots, even if they have had the experience. I’ve got to report to Barrows. Just came by to give you the word. See you later.”

“Cheerio!” Buzz called, with never a suggestion of regret in his voice.

Lieutenant Barrows outlined the morning mission, gave Red his position in the formation and repeated the same advice which Major Minton had given.

“It looks yellow to cut out for home that way,” Red again remonstrated.

“Not at all. We haven’t any pilots or planes to spare. Do as you are told and soon enough you can stay for the huffing matches. You’ll see the time when you’ll wish you could cut out for home. Turn in now and get some sleep.”

Red found it impossible to sleep. He rolled and tossed half the night, listening to Larkin’s measured breathing. When sleep came, finally, it was fitful and filled with strange dreams.

At the call he awoke with instant realization of the importance of the morning. He dressed with care, half hearing the pointless chatter which Buzz was pouring forth.

When he reached the hangar he noticed that three of the other pilots came dressed in loose fitting garments not unlike the American unionall and he surmised that those baggy suits covered a multitude of irregularities in the matter of dress. At that moment he could not have been convinced that he would live to see the day when he would pull such a garment over his pajamas and set forth to meet the enemy, sleepy-eyed, bored, and caring not a straw for dress regulations.

The planes were on the tarmac, ready and waiting.

The flight was to be in a V-shape formation, Barrows in the lead.

As Red climbed into the cockpit of his plane he noticed that the red cloudbank in the east was beginning to light up with streaks of gold and silver, heralding the advent of the sun. It seemed beyond all reason that such lovely clouds would offer hiding to an enemy filled with a dark intent.

Barrows came over to Red's machine.

"All set?" he asked.

"Right, sir."

"Good. Careful, now, and hold your position. Watch me for signals and climb as I climb. Keep your distance and look sharp. Be sure to pick out some land-marks that will guide you home in case you get separated from the flight. Don't forget

this. Sometimes a familiar church steeple is a jolly old sight to a home-seeking sinner that has lost his way. Be all eyes, you know."

"Right, sir."

A minute later Barrows' plane roared. At the signal all the others began warming up. The wind was dead against them and in another minute now they would be off.

The roar of those five planes, thundering their salutations to the dawn, shut out all other sound. But something caused Red to look around. Buzz was standing just below, hold'ng out a slip of paper and shouting words that were lost in the cataclysmic thunder of the motors.

"What is it?" Red shouted, trying to make himself heard.

Buzz grinned, handed him the slip of paper and moved back. Red glanced at the paper. It was nothing more than part of an old envelope upon which Buzz had hastily scrawled:

Good luck to The Flying Barstows.

Red turned to wave. Good old Buzz! To remember at a time like this and give no sign of his own disappointment.

Barrows' plane began to move forward. Red waited a moment. Then as number two on the right wing began to move forward he advanced his throt-

tle. Down across the dew-jewelled field they bounced, directly into the red dawning.

They were off at last. All the weary waiting was over. The long grind of training was at last bearing fruit. He was off on the dawn patrol!

Higher and higher they climbed. The sun, a molten red ball, was now above the horizon, but the blue-grey shadows masking the earth told Red that they had climbed to meet the sunrise. Below the world was still waiting for the sun.

How peaceful the quiet fields. It seemed inconceivable that this thundering phalanx of planes could be going forth to battle.

On into the sun they went, still climbing. Barrows turned north, the flight following. Not yet enough altitude, Red reasoned. They would not go over the front until they had reached eight or ten thousand feet.

Sure enough, at ten thousand Barrows turned squarely east and headed for the front, still climbing a little. Once over the lines, he turned south, beginning the patrol.

Red was trying to see everything. His head was on a pivot—like an owl's. Above, below, on both sides. To the left an enemy observation balloon was up spotting early morning artillery fire. New-born shell craters, popping like the craters in a pot of boiling mush, showed plainly that the morning strafe

was on. It would be dead easy to dive down on that kite and put it out of commission. Red found difficulty in suppressing the impulse, but evidently Barrows had sterner business in mind. Let the bag go. A little experience, and the day would come when he would run the gauntlet of protective Archie fire and puncture those clumsy bags.

A little to the west, though almost directly beneath, a British two-seater was out on some morning mission. Brave lads, Red thought, to go out in those slow-moving planes. They were certainly meat if an enemy flight chanced to spot them and had the elevation. Of course they could take care of one plane, but two—well, that was another story.

On they went, flying straight south. Barrows avoided a cloud bank that was somewhat above them. It was an excellent hiding place for the enemy and there was no use giving them the advantage. Reaching the point which the leader thought marked the southernmost limits of the patrol, they turned about and headed north. To the south Red spotted a flight of Spads. They were from a neighboring squadron and were also out looking for trouble.

The sun was now well above the horizon and the ground haze was clearing. Front line trenches, communicating trenches, crazily criss-crossed paths and trails were beginning to show faintly through the

bluish haze that had veiled the earth, but the altitude was too great for the eye to pick out detail.

As they flew northward, keeping perfect formation, Red began to lose the feeling of feverish excitement. It was rather a simple matter after all, especially in a sector where the enemy seemed to be afraid to come out. Red knew that the fame of this particular squadron went a long way toward forcing a wholesome respect in the minds of the enemy, but he hoped for combat. There was no particular thrill to be had from flying up and down the front. Buzz would expect a story and there would be nothing to tell. Silly business, flying up and down. . . .

That moment he saw them. Below, perhaps at ten thousand feet, six German planes were cruising along as though they owned the world. Red looked at Barrows. Yes, Barrows had seen them, but he was also studying that cloud bank a little ahead and somewhat higher. It might be that it was a screen for a dozen Huns, the ones below being thrown out for bait. Then, too, a high flying patrol might be sitting in the sun.

Immediately Red felt his nerves tingling. He watched Barrows for the signal. Would he dive, or was he afraid of what might be behind those clouds?

He had not long to wait. Barrows wagged his

planes, signalling the attack, and dived. Automatically, and forgetting for the moment that this was anything more than a training manoeuvre, Red pushed over his stick and followed, motor full on.

Down, down, down! They swooped like hawks upon set wings. The German planes seemed to leap up to meet them. Five against six, Red thought. To Barrows, or any old member of the squadron, the odds were fair enough—if only they were not losing altitude to in turn become the prey of a larger group hiding above. One moment Red glanced around and up. Seeing nothing, he turned his attention to the group below. As yet the enemy had not seen them, or at least gave no evidence of having seen.

As the diving planes came within a thousand feet of the Albatrosses, Red singled out his plane and began trying to get him on the sights. The enemy plane was equipped with two Spandaus. His own plane carried a Lewis gun, which fired through the propeller by means of a synchronizing gear. By aiming the nose of the plane at the enemy, he had only to wait until he was on and then thumb the trigger.

Barrows' gun began clattering. The German planes scattered as suddenly as dead leaves caught in a whirlwind. Formation was now out of the question. This was to be a dog fight; grim, relent-

less, every man for himself and going on until one force or the other, decimated by losses, turned and streaked it for home.

Red swerved to follow his enemy. He was on his tail, above and a little behind. The position was perfect. But his sights were on the tail. A little stick. There! Rat-tat-tat! The tracers were going home. A dozen rounds went through the Lewis, streaking into the fuselage and cockpit of the Albatross.

Just as Red pulled up on his stick to avoid collision, he saw the enemy airman slump down in his seat. A second later the Albatross burst into flames, hung suspended for a brief moment, then went spinning earthward trailed by a cloud of smoke.

Fascinated, unable to believe his eyes, Red watched the falling plane. How easy it had been. It was all a matter of position and advantage. A moment ago that crumpled, blazing thing had been under the guidance of a man who had life and hope and high ambition. Then out of the air death had come on swooping wings.

Rat-tat-tat! Splinters flew from one of the struts on Red's plane. Instinctively he half rolled. As he went over he looked behind. An enemy was right on his tail, his Spandaus spitting bullets.

All so easy, eh? Only a matter of position and

advantage! Well, the other man had the advantage now.

Then it was that Red remembered what Barrows had told him. Shoot and run. Like a fool he had gone to sleep in a maelstrom. Hypnotized by the sight of the fall of his first machine, he had forgotten that there were others. He had shot down one, making the odds even at five against five. Now truly it was every man for himself.

It was too late now to run. So long as he flew straight away that Albatross would hang on his tail, guns barking, until he went hurtling earthward out of control or in flames, there to become a charred, tangled bit of wreckage like unto the plane he had just sent down.

As he half rolled the enemy followed over in a half roll. Red dived. The Hun came down hard after him. Up and over the Nieuport went in a tight loop,* thinking to come in behind the German and thus gain the advantage. But that German pilot in the bright colored Albatross was not out on his first patrol. He seemed to have a sense of divination, the ability to judge what was coming next, and despite these two quick moves he was still on Red's tail. His firing had ceased, for the air tumbling was too rapid for him to keep on the target, but he was still in the position of vantage.

Sometime during the quick twisting and dodging

Red noted that the enemy plane bore a gold and black dragon painted on the fuselage. A dragon he was, indeed.

Red turned a quick Immelmann.* The Albatross followed, but in this manoeuvre Red saw that his own plane was superior in acrobatics. That being true, he could put her over in a sharp bank and begin circling and climbing. If he could outclimb the other he could get out of the range of those deadly guns and be in a position to again become the attacker.

Round and round the two planes went in so tight a circle that Red felt giddy. Once he looked down and the criss-crossed patchwork fields below were spinning like a plate. Thank God the Nieuport was climbing faster than the Hun and was gaining in the mad race of ring-around-the-rose. A little more and the hare would become the hound.

That moment never came. Realizing the danger, and seeing that the English plane was outclimbing him, the German airman waved his hand in a salute which Red thought was altogether too friendly and debonair, and nosed his plane over into a dive.

For a moment Red did not know what to make of this sudden turn. His first impulse was to dive after him, follow him down. But remembering what Barrows had told him, he straightened out his

ship and looked around. Where was he? Where were the other members of the patrol?

In his crazy, erratic fight he had taken no thought of where he was going. Escape—or victory if that were possible—had been the one compelling thought. Below he saw the Albatross come out of its spinning dive and streak for home.

Then, for the first time, Red realized how easy it was to get separated once a dog fight began. But what of the others? Had they been successful, or had they gone down?

It was no place for idle conjecture. He was alone, and inexperienced.

Inexperienced? With a glow of pride he remembered that he had just sent down his first plane. High moment that it was, it had been wiped from his mind by the hazard of what had followed swiftly upon its heels. But had he not out-manoeuvred a second enemy airman? Had he not gained the right to stay and fight?

Even so, it was no safe place for a lone plane. For a moment he thought it a little strange that Barrows and the others would leave him to his fate. It must be that they had been vanquished. But then, if that were true, would not the other enemy planes have pounced upon him?

For ten minutes Red flew straight west, looking for some familiar landmark that would guide him

home. Finding none, he turned toward the northwest. The trenches were now far behind. Below a long line of motor lorries was winding along a white ribbon of roadway and at a road intersection a regiment of infantry was halted, waiting for the lorries to pass. They would have escaped his notice but for the fact that a sudden flash of white ran the whole line of the halted column. The fools! They wouldn't keep their heads down. A thousand men in line, turning faces skyward, made a flash of white that even the most inexperienced airman could not escape. It was a good thing that the Huns had been made afraid to come over.

Red knew that the infantrymen had been warned a thousand times against looking up, yet to a soldier the romance of the air was so great that it would have been easier to stick his finger in his eye than to keep from gazing aloft when the distant hum of a motor told him that some rider of the air was out to seek adventure. Friend or foe, it made not the slightest difference to the groundman so far as his interest was concerned.

The presence of the lorries told Red one thing; he must be a good way back of the lines, and still no landmark which he recognized. It was stupid to get lost on such a clear day. Buzz would have the laugh on him, while Barrows, if he had not been lost, would have a great deal to say about young

pilots who did not observe instructions in the matter of doing as they were told.

He swung his plane sharply southward, then later toward the southeast in a direction that must in time bring him back to the front. Ah! There was the church at the little town south of their hangar. It was easy now.

Five minutes later he dropped down onto the field and taxied up to the line. There sat Barrows' plane, and the four others. Victory! It could mean nothing else. And there came Buzz, running out to meet him, closely followed by Barrows and the four other pilots.

Almost the moment Red's feet touched the ground Buzz had his hand, pumping it up and down in frenzied glee.

"You got one! You got one!" Red heard him exulting. "Barrows saw you. But we had given you up. He didn't know what happened to you after that."

"Plenty!" Red told him.

Lieutenant Barrows came up.

"Top hole, old fellow," he said with a simple reserve which Red knew marked the limit of this Englishman's enthusiasm. "I saw you get that first beggar. Things got a bit thick just then and I lost sight of you. What happened?"

"I followed him down, watching," Red admitted

reluctantly, "and when I woke up there was another one sitting on my tail. I forgot to cut for home—as you told me."

A twinkle came into Barrows' eyes. "You won't forget again, I daresay. I see he put some bullets through your wings."

"He did. And I showed him that this bus could out-climb his Albatross. Since then I've been—"

"Lost," Barrows completed the sentence with a suddenness that surprised Red. "But never mind. You made it, that's the big thing. Go in and make out your report. We've a pretty decent record to send back to the Wing for this morning's work."

"What happened to you?" Red asked.

Barrows held up a finger. "One. And Hedges got one. Three out of six. Not half bad—what?"

"Exactly half bad," Red answered as he turned to examine the damage done to his plane by enemy bullets.

Barrows contracted his eyebrows in serious thought. "What does he mean by that?" he asked Larkin.

"Oh, just a Yankee's idea of humor," Buzz answered, laboring at suppressing a smile. "Try and figure it out. It isn't so difficult. Six planes—three shot down. Half of them, see. Exactly half bad. See?"

"Oh!" said Barrows, still striving for the point.

"Oh, Lord!" Buzz said as he walked around the plane to join Red in his inspection. "Say, Shrimp, do you know that old saw about 'He who laughs last?' "

"Yes, 'He who laughs last laughs best.' Why?"

"You've got it wrong. He who laughs last is English. Don't give Barrows any more jokes. He's liable to see the point some day right in the middle of a fight and laugh himself into Kingdom Come. You gotta be careful. How does it feel to get your first Hun, old hoss?"

Red turned and faced him, every trace of amusement gone from his face.

"I dunno, Buzz. It makes you feel—you wait and see. I can't talk much. It all happens so quick. I thought I'd be tickled pink."

"Aren't you?"

"I don't know whether I'm tickled or scared. Cut it. I don't want to talk about it."

"But you'll have to tell about it at mess. Everyone does."

"Well, I may have my heart beating normal again by that time—but I doubt it."

CHAPTER IX

THE NIGHT RAID

That afternoon Barrows again went on patrol but he left Red behind, despite bitter protest, holding that Red had forced his luck enough for one day. Buzz was eager enough to take his place, but Barrows vetoed that too, offering no reason at all, and the four planes hopped off with Red and Buzz watching and growling at their luck.

Left behind with little to do, and having made his report to the Wing on the morning affray, Red decided to do a little painting on his ship. It was a sort of ritualistic rite, this painting of a design on the side of the fuselage, with the design and meaning left entirely to the mood and the imagination of the pilot.

With red, yellow and black paint Red designed and worked out a shrimp that was more lobster than anything else, but what he lacked in technique was made up in color. When he had finished his labor the monster shrimp bore every appearance of having

been parboiled to a beautiful crimson. Now the shrimp could go out after the dragon.

Two or three mechanics stopped to view Red's efforts. If they had any thoughts in the matter they hid them behind typical English silence. Having at last completed the job to his liking, Red then outlined some letters below the design and began filling in with black block letters shaded with red. When this was finished he backed off to view the effect. The line was this:

THE FLYING BARSTOWS

The note from Buzz that morning had given him the idea. Good luck to The Flying Barstows, Buzz had written, and the luck had been good.

It was a totem, a charm, a good-luck legend, call it what you will, but many a stout-hearted pilot had seized upon less as his symbol of good fortune. No two men carried the same charm, probably working under the theory that no guardian angel could possibly find time to look after two aviators. As a matter of fact, guardian angels were not always able to take care of one, as was evidenced by the fact that pilots were considered expendable and were requisitioned in much the same fashion as other supplies.

However, a pilot considered himself more or less invulnerable so long as he carried his particular

charm. Perhaps it was only a pose, or a hope born of need. Aloft, where machine guns clatter, motors roar, and where Archies crash like laughing gods clapping their giant hands, there is real need of something upon which a man may pin his faith and hope and having so placed it go on about the stern business at hand.

So, since Larkin's hurried note had served him once (and who could doubt its power after what had happened on that first patrol?), Red had folded it neatly away in the inner pocket of his coat. To make it doubly effective he had now emblazoned it in gaudy letters beneath the parboiled shrimp.

McCready, a Canadian pilot just sent up from the Wing, was out brousing around for a "look see." He came up to view Red's handiwork. Unlike the English, he was American enough to engage in conversation without any formalities.

"What's the animal?" he asked, a broad smile serving abundantly as an introduction.

"It's a shrimp," Red answered. "What does it look like?"

"Like a paint can tipped over. But now that you mention it, I can see the shrimp."

There was a laughing frankness about the man that made Red like him despite his taunts. His eyes twinkled with humor and little lines of laughter were at the corners of his mouth and eyes.

"It's this way," Red explained. "Somehow or other I've always been called a little shrimp. Size, maybe. So I decided to take it for my emblem. My name's McGee." He held out his hand.

"Mine's McCready. This is a war of the Mac's. The Lord help England if the Scotch and the Irish ever get peaceable. Every time I turn around I meet a McSomebody-or-other. You're American, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"So am I—almost. I was born at the Soo, just across the river. When do you suppose the States will begin sending over some men? It sure took them long enough to come in. If they spend as much time getting ready to fight as they took to declare war, we'll be washed out before they get here."

Red shook his head. "Don't bring up the subject. I hear it morning, noon and night. Only yesterday I heard a dud called a Yank, and when I asked why, the Limey laughed and said, 'Oh, it didn't explode, you know. Too proud to fight. What?' He seemed to enjoy the joke hugely. I felt like giving him a bat on the nose. They have some strange ideas about what is funny."

"Funny?" McCready lifted his brows in feigned surprise. "Why, you mustn't accuse them of knowing what's funny. But they do know what's humor-

ous. There's a difference. What does that line 'The Flying Barstows' stand for?"

Red flushed and began searching for an answer. This man was a "townner." Like all others, he would have no conception of the family pride in a professional name.

Before he could frame a suitable reply he heard the droning sound of a plane. Both looked up. A Nieuport was dropping down to the field. Something about the stick work challenged attention. It was Harrow's plane. It made a faulty landing, lurched heavily, nearly went over on the nose, then righted and came bounding up to the line.

Red knew that something was wrong. Harrow was a pilot far too skilled to handle his plane in that fashion. Sensing tragedy, Red started toward the plane just as Buzz and several other officers came running out.

Harrow crawled from the cockpit rather unsteadily, missed his footing and fell heavily. He fairly dragged himself into a half upright position.

Red was the first to reach him and saw that his flying suit was soaked with blood. A glance at the plane told the story. German bullets had raked the fuselage from tail to cockpit.

Harrow gasped, fought for control, and with the last ounce of conscious strength, said; "Barrows—

Holden—Payne—all down. Nine Huns—in a cloud.”

His fingers loosed their hold on the side of the plane and he fell face forward on the soggy field. A brief, tragic recital, but to an airman it told the whole story. He was not the first wounded man to tool home his ship, fighting for strength and consciousness.

Red bent over to lift him. From somewhere, either by miracle or a sixth sense of divination, two men came running with a stretcher. Tenderly, carefully they lifted the unconscious man and carried him to the field hospital.

An hour later the distressed Major Minton was calling Wing, requisitioning three new pilots, and at the same time calling on high heaven to witness that not even a dozen green pilots could take the place of Barrows, Holden and Payne. But the war must be prosecuted; the supremacy of the air maintained. To-morrow the dawn patrol must go out with a spirit and snap that took no thought of losses or reverses. The enemy must pay for all losses.

There was a shifting of personnel. At mess, a soggy, silent, heartless gathering robbed of its usual spirited chaff and banter, Buzz was informed by Major Minton that he was to go out the next morning with C Flight, Lieutenant Russell (“Battle-ship” Russell) commanding. The rest of the flight

would be made up by Harper, Bartlett and McGee. Three old heads, wise and wily, and two new ones.

“Battleship” Russell was one of the largest men in the air force. Six feet three, weight over two hundred and thirty pounds, square-shouldered and square-jawed, he made his way both on the ground and in the air exactly as one might expect—he plowed through things. In combat he had the habit of holding his ship’s nose on the enemy until a collision seemed inevitable, at the last minute diving under or zooming over with only inches to spare. In speech he was mild as a lamb. Like many large men, he was constantly thinking of the other fellow. Every man in the squadron liked him and was glad to see him elevated to the command of a flight.

After mess Red and Buzz went to their quarters, jubilant over the fact that Buzz was to go out on patrol the next morning, but at the same time depressed over the fate that had befallen Barrows, Holden and Payne. Harrow, with a machine gun bullet through his left shoulder, had regained consciousness and the medico gave out the news that he would recover, barring unforeseen complications. Whether he would ever fly again was quite another question, depending more upon his mental recovery than upon any physical disability.

In the air service the mind plays quite as important a role as the body. A pilot may function

perfectly for a long time and then, under the stress and strain of many air battles, develop a mental hazard which no amount of physical courage could overcome. Knowing this, the doctors watched the pilots as a mother watches a child. If a pilot grew jumpy, slept poorly, lost his appetite or developed any of a hundred signs that betrayed his true condition—bingo! The doctor spoke and that man was grounded. Every pilot feared that fate. It was not exactly comforting to think of being shot down, but it was vastly better than being grounded. Poor Harrow might recover, but would he come back in every way? Would he “get the wind up?”

Buzz put the whole matter in a nutshell when he said to Red, a short time after they entered their quarters, “This is a funny game. If the enemy fails to get you, something else will. Just think—three of the men who went out with you this morning are done. And all old heads.”

“It’s a hard game,” Red agreed. “You get to feeling like a pebble in a box with a lot of other pebbles and with some one shaking the box all the time. About the time you begin to form some attachments something happens and you have to start all over again—new faces, new surroundings, new everything. Do you ever look back on all the things that have happened since we started training? There was Hare, Wilson, Hood—all my friends and all

washed out at school. Hare was a mighty fine prospect, I thought, but a Brass Hat washed him out. They tell me he's in the infantry now."

"Yes, he is. You couldn't keep a fellow like Hare from doing his bit. And then there's a dozen more that passed out learning to fly those old Avros and shorthorn Farmans. Boy! Some of those old busses that they gave cadets to fly had their wings tied on with wire and cotton string. If you can get through training, I'll say you are a flyer. You remember that—"

The reminiscence was cut short by a knock at the door.

"Come!" Red called.

Battleship Russell entered and threw his ponderous bulk into a chair. He filled it to overflowing. His manner and a wrinkled brow indicated that he was quite cut up.

"We are the bait to-morrow morning," he announced dolefully. "The Major says we've got to show the Hun that he can't win victories without paying high for them. So to-morrow my flight goes out at a low altitude with the Major and two other flights up against the ceiling waiting for someone to jump us. Talk about luck! The minute I draw command of a flight I get sent out for bait." He sat for a moment gazing at the floor. "I want to talk

to you two," he said at last, "and I want you to listen.

"I've been combat flying for nearly a year. I've learned some things—else I wouldn't still be here. You, McGee, have some very laudable and quite foolish ideas about winning this war in a hurry and doing a lot of it yourself. It can't be done that way. You forgot orders this morning and got away with it."

"But—but I say! That fellow was on my tail before I had a chance to run."

"All right," Russell went on, "what's past is done. But to-morrow, if the Hun peaks down on us, you and Larkin draw out of it as quick as you can. The Major and his gang will be down on them quick enough—I hope."

"How long does this sort of thing have to go on?" Red asked, his tone belligerent.

"Not any too long. You'll get enough before you are through. And you, Larkin, I want you to keep formation and watch me for signals. In no case break formation until I give the sign. And if—listen! What's that?"

He jumped from his chair and started for the door on the run. A shrill voiced siren, used as a signal to warn of a raid, was going full blast. Archie batteries had opened up and from aloft came the dull *poof!* of the shells as they exploded.

Red and Buzz followed Russell to the door. There, for the first time, they caught sound of the German motors droning through the pitch black night. On they came. Whether this particular 'drome was their objective none could say, but it was a foregone conclusion that they had a big basket of "eggs" to lay in somebody's back yard and Archie would never stop them.

Out of the pitch black sky a German plane dived earthward, squarely down the beam of the giant searchlight, his machine gun clattering in an effort to blind the eye of the light. That German airman, scornful of all danger, was diving at a speed of nearly two hundred miles an hour. Soon he would straighten out, if his wings held on, and drop a flare that would provide the bombers with a well illumined target.

The flare burst a moment later, lighting up the field and the hangars as though a great searchlight had been thrown upon them. Seconds passed. A swishing, whistling sound, followed by a tremendous explosion at the far end of the field. Close enough! Too close, for it was only the first of many.

Russell backed into the house, pushing Red and Buzz before him and slammed the door. The explosions were coming in earnest now.

"As good a place as any," Russell said. "A direct hit will wash you out no matter where you are,

and the walls of this old house will stop the nose fuses and fragments. Whew! That was close!"

The windows in the old house rattled with each explosion and there was the sound of breaking glass. The candle on the table was snuffed out by a deafening concussion. Pandemonium reigned. Someone was running around outside, shouting. Another explosion. The shouting ceased.

The raid lasted but a few minutes, but to Red and Buzz it seemed an age. They had been in raids before—once in London and again during training when the Zeppelins made a feeble and futile attempt to raid Hounslow. But in both those raids the bombs had fallen a long way off and there seemed to be nothing personal in it. This was a different matter. The raiders were striking home and they were hitting the target.

Just what damage had been done they could not say, but the minute they heard the planes drawing off they bolted for the door.

Damage enough! One of the hangars had received a direct hit and was in merry flames. Mechanics and officers alike were rushing around in thoughtless circles, eager enough to do something but as yet lacking a leader. The blazing hangar had but that day been erected. Fortunately it contained no planes, though a considerable quantity of petrol

had been stored there and any moment this would let go.

Red heard Russell's bull-like voice shouting orders and like the others, finding a man who seemed to know what was to be done, he began helping roll the planes from the hangar nearest the one in flames.

It was fast, hot work. Just as the last plane was rolled onto the field the gasoline caught and the fireworks began.

Two bombs had messed up the field in such a way that the take-off would be made extremely difficult until repairs could be made, but as Red worked he knew that as certain as dawn came, the patrol would go out. There might be no sleep, the landing field might be as full of shell holes as No Man's Land, and everything in the world made topsy-turvy—still those Englishmen would manage to get into the air and carry on as though nothing had happened. The German raiders would go to their nest chuckling over their success, but they would pay for their laugh.

Two mechanics had been killed; a hangar destroyed; two planes badly damaged; the flying field pock-marked and a night of rest turned into a night of work. It made things disagreeable, but it also made men very angry. When the dawn came they would roar skyward like angry hornets. Red-eyed from the loss of sleep, and under normal conditions

too weary to do good stick work, yet they would be buoyed up by the desire to show the enemy that night work couldn't win a war.

"Just my luck!" Buzz Larkin grouched to Russell when they had finally extinguished the flaming remains of the hangar. "The morning I'm picked to go Heinie comes over and stops the parade."

Russell looked at him quizzically for a moment and then smiled.

"Don't worry, old dear. You don't know the C. O. The dawn patrol will go out. Up with the lark, you know, and all that sort of thing."

CHAPTER X

THE DOG FIGHT

The morning dawned clear. Major Minton, with a flight of five planes, was to take off first, followed by a second group of five who were to form the middle layer. Buzz Larkin had been shifted to this middle flight, though he had hoped to go with Red, who was to be in the third group under Russell.

Minton's plan was this: He would take his flight up against the ceiling while the second, or middle group would fly at ten to twelve thousand feet. Below, at about six thousand would be Russell's flight—the bait. That group of low planes would look most attractive to the enemy. Bucked up by the victory of yesterday and the success of the bombing raid that night, they would have keen appetites for a little more blood.

If the flight under Russell's command succeeded in sucking them down, then the middle flight would dive down and there would be a lovely dog fight. Major Minton, riding high above with his flight, could wait until he was sure that no second and

larger group of Huns was hiding in the sun, and then, if all was clear he would come down on a stage all set for a grand clean-up.

So much for the plan. If it worked, the squadron would fatten its record of planes shot down and some German airmen would never return to the Fatherland.

As the motors were warming Red fought the desire to give Buzz some last minute advice, but remembering that he had heard nothing of what was offered on his own first flight, silence seemed to be the greater virtue. So with a wave of the hand, signaling good luck, he walked over to McCready's plane.

McCready was to be in the Major's flight, top layer, and it was also his first trip over the lines. Despite the fact that he seemed calm and cool, Red noticed that he was wide-eyed, as though surprised, and that his face was grim and expressionless. Gone were the little lines of laughter at the corners of the eyes and mouth.

Red knew just how he felt. No use for any man to offer him last minute advice. The great hour had come for him at last and his thoughts were all his own, incapable of being disturbed by shouted instructions from well meaning friends.

The first flight roared away, followed a few minutes later by the second unit of five planes. Then

Russell and his group had their planes rolled to the line, warmed their motors, examined their guns and when the two upper flights had gained altitude they taxied down the field and took off into the red eye of the sun.

At five thousand feet Russell headed toward the front, still climbing a little and keeping a wise eye on the middle flight several thousand feet above. Red could not locate the top flight, but he knew that all must be well for Russell was heading straight for enemy territory.

As they came to the line Archie got busy, plastering the sky with black roses that burst into blossom with thunderous abruptness. Direct hits were rare, but a sky full of whizzing, jagged metal can make any pilot wish he were elsewhere. Some of the Boche anti-aircraft gunners were sufficiently skilled to cause a wise pilot to change his course ten or fifteen degrees every thirty seconds. If this failed, a few acrobatics would soon have Archie bursting harmlessly hundreds of yards away.

But this morning Russell flew straight through the fire. Now and then the planes rocked with a sudden violence and once Red saw a jagged hole appear in the fabric of one of his wings. Just as he was beginning to wish that Russell would change his course, two white wreathed Archies burst dead

ahead. It could mean but one thing—a warning from British batteries below.

German Archie bursts were all black, while the British bursts, because of using high explosive, were white. Those two white rings, dead ahead, signaled the lower flight that the ground batteries had spotted a high flying group of enemy airmen who, sitting in the sun, were waiting the proper moment to swoop down to kill.

Red shielded his eyes and tried to look into the sun. Not a thing to be seen. He looked forward at Russell and saw that he was holding a thumb directly before one eye in an effort to shut out the blinding ray and thus catch a blurred glimpse of the enemy.

A moment later Russell wagged his planes to attract attention and pointed upward. Red felt his throat pounding. He craned his neck to catch sight of the protecting flights above. Not a plane in sight. Yes, far, far above he saw a group of five little spots. That would be the Major's flight. But how small they looked, how very far away. Distance robbed them of every semblance of war-like characteristics. They became five harmless gnats, held aloft by some vexing air current. What could they do to arrest the flight of a flock of swooping butcher birds?

Any moment now the German planes might swoop down. Minutes seemed ages. Lieutenant

Russell held to his course, making no move that would betray to the enemy that he had sighted them. Perhaps the trap had failed. Certainly the enemy would not come down if they had spotted the upper flights.

Looking down Red saw a two-seated Rumpler a good two thousand feet below. Out on some photographic mission, it was going blithely on its way under the protection of the flight above.

Here was a solution, Red thought; the one sure way to suck down the enemy. If they dived on the Rumpler, the enemy would be almost honor bound to come to the rescue. Then, thundering down on their tails would come the upper flights and a lovely dog fight would be on. But Russell was too old a bird for any such manoeuvring. If he saw the Rumpler, he made no sign.

To Red it seemed nothing less than a God-given opportunity. It was cold meat and he proposed to forthwith fatten his score. Forgetting all that had been told him about keeping formation, he nosed over with motor full on and dropped down on the Rumpler at a rate of speed that might tear his wings off when he attempted to level off.

Russell saw the dive and swore under his breath. He knew what Red was soon to learn—that a two-seater could give a single scout an exceedingly warm

reception. If left alone in his foolish endeavor, Red might soon be out of the war.

Russell gave the signal to the other members of his flight and dived. He knew that it would draw the enemy down, but he had not thought it wise to sacrifice so much altitude over enemy territory, especially since a fairly strong wind was blowing from the west. If a motor conked, that plane was destined to land in enemy territory.

Fuming over the folly of youth, Russell dived to overtake Red and cut him off. He was too late. He knew what wings would stand, while if Red knew, he did not seem to care.

Glancing around to see that the others were following, Russell offered up a prayer for divine aid that was strangely intermingled with words both pungent and expressive of his opinion of a young and foolish flyer who didn't know the difference between meat and being meat.

Red warmed his gun as he swooped down. There was no need for secrecy, for the observer in the Rumpler was already training his rear gun.

Rat-tat-tat! The German gun spoke first and Red saw the tracers through his wings. No blind spot there. Further over he went, intending to dive under, zoom up and let him have a round through the propeller, not knowing that the Rumpler was armed in such a way that it had no blind spot.*

But for the fact that Russell was storming down on his tail, Red might have learned a great deal about attacking two-seaters single-handed. But the pilot of the Rumpler had his hands full. His was a plane depending more upon its formidable armament for protection than upon speed or manoeuvring. The observer, sitting in the rear seat, could devote his entire attention to an attacker coming in from behind or at the side; the pilot could take care of a plane directly in front and could even fire down on a scout who attempted to come up under and hang on his prop for a fleeting moment while he turned loose with his guns. The fact that most of the German two-seaters had no "blind spot" had been discovered by many a scout who had plunged to the attack alone, thinking that he had discovered cold meat only to learn that he was in for an exceedingly merry time.

As Red swung around in a vertical bank he saw tracers from Russell's Lewis traversing the fuselage and noticed that the enemy observer, busy with his gun, lifted himself in a sudden convulsive movement and then slumped down in his seat.

Lieutenant Russell, wise and skilled in aerial fighting, had reduced the pilot's chances to zero. Robbed of protection from behind, surrounded by enemy wasps that swooped and stung, and flying a plane too slow and too cumbersome for such un-

equal warfare, that pilot had but one clear chance left—to go down spinning, feigning disability and trusting to high heaven that he would be able to bring the heavy plane out of the spin* before crashing.

In a moment it was evident that the German airman had no such intention. His fighting blood was up. Or perhaps he had seen what the others had not, for peaking down in his defense came eight Albatrosses. He knew that in another minute a dog fight would begin and the troublesome British scouts would be far too busy to pay any more attention to a lone two-seater.

Russell and the other members of the flight saw the diving planes and manoeuvred for position. But Red had eyes for but one thing. Coming in on the Rumpler's tail he sent a stream of bullets going from his gun. Tracers showed that he was over the mark and he nosed down a little. That moment the Rumpler side slipped and he was off the target. No matter, another turn would put him in position again and then—

Rat-tat-tat-tat! Red jerked his head up and around. An Albatross was on his tail. Over he went in a half roll, noticing in that brief second that the sky seemed filled with planes bearing black crosses. The trap worked. Now, if only the upper flights came down!

No time to look, no time for anything but absolute concentration on the job at hand. As the fast diving Albatross over-shot him Red noticed that it bore a gold and black dragon on its fuselage. The enemy of yesterday. Dragon against Shrimp! But Red's swift manoeuver spoiled the other's aim and he was quickly engaged by another Nieuport.

For the next few minutes things happened far too fast for analysis or retelling. Only a few things Red noticed. Below, seemingly almost on the carpet, he saw the Rumpler hedge-hopping for home with a singleness of purpose that took no thought of dog fights and huffing matches. Carrying a dead observer, the pilot knew that this particular sector was for the time being exceedingly unhealthy.

To the right Red saw a Hun going down in flames. A second later one of the ships of his own flight hurtled past him, out of control. This caused him to glance upward. What he saw caused him to smile grimly. The middle flight had followed the enemy down and behind them now came the Major. The trap was sprung. Now for the slaughter!

Tracers through his wings brought Red to the realization that he had his own troubles. Good flying and good marksmanship would be the only thing that would save him from being one of the slain. Going into an Immelmann, he barely missed collision with another diving Albatross. It seemed

that their wings almost touched. He saw the tense, frightened look on the face of the other airman as he swept by but not until he heard a splintering crash did he realize that escape had come in a swift, nerve-chilling manner.

The diving Albatross collided with another that was coming down on Red's tail. For a measurable moment the two planes, locked in a death grip, hung suspended as they spun slowly around like some foolish toy on a string. One of the pilots, face blanched in horror, fought vainly with his useless controls. The other seemed to be making an attempt to lift himself from the cockpit as though he would step out and escape. Vain, foolish, automatic endeavor! The next second they were spinning earthward in a last wild plunge.

Red felt a great nausea in the pit of his stomach. It was an effective way to blot out two planes, but no one could rejoice over it. To send an opponent down in flames, or force him down out of control, was a creditable performance for which one might justly feel a glow of pride. It was a sporting proposition, in which two men, each fighting for a cause which he thought just, gambled his life on his skill and his marksmanship. Glory awaited the victor—Death the vanquished. But here two men were going down to death with no one the victor, and with their cause profiting nothing by their passing.

Vaguely these thoughts passed through Red's mind, but with a swiftness that made no analysis and drew no conclusions. Things were happening with the speed of light. The difference between life and death was marked by seconds and the stuttering of angry machine guns.

Left for the moment without an adversary, Red began climbing in steep banks,* looking for a chance to strike. The duelling planes had drifted apart. In one place he saw three of his own flight pouncing on a single plane. Below another Nieuport was chasing a disabled plane homeward, filling it with enough lead to sink it.

Suddenly, seemingly from nowhere, a Nieuport flashed past, followed by a pursuing Hun. The Nieuport was doing everything on the list but he couldn't shake that Albatross.

In the fleeting glance Red recognized Buzz and saw that he was working feverishly over a gun jam. Meat for the Hun!

Red brought his plane around sharply enough to tear off both wings and drove after the enemy. Again he saw tracers passing through his wings. Looking up he saw a Hun diving on him. Disregarding the danger as though it did not exist he peaked straight down on the plane that was making life so miserable and uncertain for Buzz.

At a hundred yards he got the cockpit square in

the sights and let go. The gods of war and of fate must have directed those bullets. It was a direct hit. A stream of lead poured into the pilot's body. He slumped down as though suddenly exhausted. As Red pulled up to zoom over he saw the Albatross nose up on a stick pulled back and held in the grip of a dead man. Then it stalled, hung for a moment on its prop and went down spinning.

No time for anything else. There was a hornet on his own tail. Buzz, now out of danger for the moment, was still working at his gun jam and unable to render any assistance. In fact, he should be tooling the old bus back home. It was no place for a greenhorn with a jammed gun.

Red had saved Larkin's life and was in a good position to lose his own. One moment he was the pursuer, victorious through the fortune of a lucky hit, the next he was tumbling, turning, twisting, in an effort to shake off an enemy grimly determined to exact toll. But the Hun, with eyes and attention riveted on his quarry, was making an old and often fatal mistake. In the lust of the chase he forgot all else, forgot that an air fighter, to live long and prosper, must have a head like an owl and keep it constantly turning.

Major Minton was sitting above the fight, watching for just such a moment. Like an arrow he came down on the Albatross and with all the skill and

knowledge gained through fifteen victories, he came in a little above and behind. It was short, swift, skilled work. It is doubtful if the German ever knew exactly what happened. Red himself did not know and he continued to do acrobatics until, with surprise, he saw his opponent spinning down. It was a flamer, prized above all other victories.

Feeling as foolish as a frightened rabbit, Red glanced back and up to see Major Minton wave a jaunty salutation. Sixteen for the Major! And he was growing wiser every day.

Red was not the first man who could thank Major Minton for his life. He was a fighting C. O., capable and heady, and always hanging around at the very time he was most needed. Small wonder that he was loved and admired by his own men and feared and respected by the enemy.

Turning, Red again began looking for trouble. The Major's plane cut in ahead of him and he saw the Major waving him back and pointing west. Or was it east? Or south? The world had been spinning around for the last several minutes and direction was not easy to determine. Looking in the direction indicated Red saw Buzz streaking it back toward the lines. Then he understood. Buzz, with his guns jammed, would be easy picking for any plane that chanced to sight him. Realizing this, the Major was signaling Red to follow him and, if oc-

casion arose, fight off any attacker that tried to make the most of a golden opportunity.

Red did not want to leave the dog fight, but another impatient gesture told him plainly that the C. O. expected his signals to be obeyed as promptly as the spoken word.

Red was surprised at the speed with which he overtook Buzz. Then, too, Buzz was losing altitude and was now down to a scant two thousand feet. In a flash Red knew the whole story. One of the enemy bullets had struck some vital part of the plane and the motor had conked.

A second look. No, the motor had not cut out altogether, but the propeller was no longer a blur as it was when turning over at a maximum. He could catch glimpses of the blades, not unlike the illusion of motion pictures of moving vehicles which seem to make the wheels halt jerkily and spin backward with intermittent flashes of light reflecting from the wheels.

Red looked down. They were now over the second line of defense trenches on the German front. Machine guns from the ground were trying to end Larkin's sturdy efforts to get the plane back across the lines.

With a feeling of helplessness Red stayed above him. There was nothing in the world he could do. Everything now depended upon the ability of the

pilot to get the utmost inch out of a well nigh powerless plane.

Making a swift estimate, Red saw that it would be a close call. Even if Buzz succeeded in getting the plane across the lines he would be forced to a rough landing in a terrain pock-marked with shell holes. Buzz would have to land with the wind quartering his tail. He would need his last foot of altitude to clear the front line and this would leave neither time nor altitude for swinging into the wind. He would have to pick out some spot between shell holes and set her down with a crash. Poor Buzz was in for a crack-up; that much was certain.

At less than two hundred feet he crossed No Man's Land and swept over the front line. Startled, upturned faces in the trenches marked the position of infantrymen who had been watching the descent with speechless wonderment, while from the German trenches baffled gunners were still trying vainly to wing their bird.

As the plane crossed the first British trench Red saw three or four Tommies waving their hands in joyful acclaim. To them the race was won, but to Red and Buzz it was just beginning. The next thirty seconds would tell the story.

Left with a Hobson's choice in the matter of landing, Buzz could only pancake her down and pray that Lady Luck would ride at his side. The plane

struck hard, bounded, careened along the ground like a frightened wing-clipped fowl trying to take the air and then ignominiously buried her nose in a shell hole.

Above, Red circled. Unable to land and offer aid, he could only circle around while waiting to see if Buzz climbed out of the wreck. It seemed an age before he saw Buzz extricate himself from the wreckage and scramble up the side of the shell hole. He seemed dazed and a trifle wobbly, but at sight of Red's circling plane he lifted one arm in a waving salute.

Some soldiers came running out of the trenches. Red knew that they would take Buzz back to Headquarters, place him in a side car and send him back to the squadron. A sorry homecoming for an airman, but the fact that he was at least safe and alive filled Red with a great elation. With a wave of the hand he started climbing and headed for home.

CHAPTER XI

A FORCED LANDING

The best laid plans of mice and men go oft astray, and certainly misadventure can easily overtake a lone, home-going war pilot with a brain so fevered by recent high action that he quite forgets to keep an eye peeled for the enemy.

After satisfying himself that Buzz had gotten off with no more than a crashed plane, Red climbed to about three thousand feet, all the while looking toward the front in an effort to pick up some of his companions. Seeing nothing, he started home. It had been a glorious dog fight. Beyond doubt the enemy had come off second best. It was a fight difficult to analyze and still more difficult to remember. Things had happened too swiftly. Red was certain of two things—he had fattened his score by sending down the pilot who had so relentlessly pursued Buzz when his guns were jammed. Then, in turn, his own life had been saved by the watchful Major. That had been a close, warm moment. What a reunion there would be back at the squadron!

Something caused Red to look behind and up. What a fool he had been to forget that reunions are only for those who keep a sharp eye—and *plenty of altitude*.

Storming down on him came two enemy planes—an Albatross and a strange new type which he did not recognize. Above, probably at ten thousand feet, he saw six other enemy planes. They were the main flight, playing the watch dog while these two dived for a little cold meat. Where were those Archie gunners? Asleep?

Well, he, too, had been asleep. If he didn't do exactly the right thing, and that speedily, he would soon be enjoying a much longer sleep.

Over he went on his nose so swiftly that the pursuing plane overshot him. But the next plane was quick and in the hands of a good pilot. It followed Red, guns stuttering.

Red half rolled, escaping for the moment. At the same time he noticed that the plane which had overshot him was again coming in to the fight and in amazement noticed that it carried on its fuselage a gold and black dragon!

What sort of enemy was this? Had not this same plane been back there in the dog fight? Could he be everywhere?

A stream of bullets from the other diving plane stopped all speculation. It was a hit. Red's motor

went out instantly and the other plane was again coming in on his tail.

This was the end. He would never hear the tales told at the reunion and Major Minton would wearily requisition a new pilot.

There was one chance left. Put her nose down while he still had momentum and dive so hard that it would be a question whether her wings would hold when he tried to straighten her out down on the carpet. Of course they would follow him down, filling him full of lead, but it was all that was left.

He dived like a comet. Tracers were still going through his wings. Without looking behind he knew that the Hun was following in a dive as steep as his own. The wires screamed as though in fright. The fields below were billowing upward to meet him. Let them come, swiftly.

At less than a thousand feet he glanced back. A small plane which he could not identify was still following, blazing away, and the Albatross was just behind and a little to the right. Rotten marksmen, Red thought. Even so, they were determined to make him stick his nose in the ground.

Below, bordered by a small wood, lay a field level as a floor and with comparatively few shell holes. A haven created by the gods of war for foolish aviators.

That landing was made with no thought of wind-

age and with a fine disregard for the fact that a Nieuport was made for the air and disliked the ground exceedingly—especially rough ground—and would most certainly nose over in a quartering wind.

Over on her nose she went. Crash! went the prop as the tail came up. She stood on her nose for a measurable moment and then flopped over.

Dazed by a blow on the head that lifted a bump as big as an egg, and with a hot, stabbing pain in his side, Red managed to drag himself from out of the wreckage. He noticed little dust dervishes jumping up all around. He glanced up. Like angry wasps those two planes were still pumping lead into the ground. Talk about a sporting proposition!

Red lifted his hand to shake his fist and was rewarded by another burst from the dragon painted Albatross. Then the pilot leaned out of the cockpit, waved his hand in jaunty salute and started climbing.

First blood for the dragon!

Red turned to look at his own ship. Suddenly faint and sick, he sat down heavily. With his legs sprawled wide apart he sat there holding a bruised and throbbing head, trying hard to realize just what had happened.

The Shrimp was certainly a wreck. He turned his head aloft. The two victorious planes were go-

ing up with all speed to join the protecting flight which now was coming in for a good Archie strafing.

Red gritted his teeth. If those cursed Archie gunners had been on the job he would never have fallen into such a trap. Now all that he had accomplished was wiped out by this silly crash. The Nieuport, which he had taken such pride in decorating, was a sorry mess and his head hurt like the very deuce.

Sitting there with his head in his hands, he was so completely taken up with trouble that he failed to notice a Second Lieutenant and two or three men who came running out of the woods.

"Cheerio!" said the Lieutenant as he came up to where Red was sitting. "Rather good war, what?"

"Rotten!" Red said, his head throbbing like a giant engine. "Where am I?"

"Somewhere in France," answered the Lieutenant. "More specifically, about three hundred yards from the maddest artillery captain in France. He seems a bit cut up about your messing up his back yard this way. You know, the enemy sometimes shell a sector where a plane crashes and we don't like the noise. Besides, we have a lovely camouflaged position over there in the woods and we don't like discovery. Are you hurt?"

"Oh, no," Red said as he got to his feet a bit unsteadily. "I'm feeling fine. I do this every

morning as a sort of cure for the blues. It gives me an interest in things. See that bump on my head?"

"Which is the bump and which is your head?" asked the officer.

Red forced a laugh and a stabbing pain ran through his side. He gripped it with both hands and held his breath, wondering if one of those machine gun bullets had actually found the mark. For a moment he bent over in pain.

"Are you wounded?" asked the Lieutenant, all jest gone from his voice.

Red opened his flying suit, thrust his hand under his shirt and began feeling around. His hand came out dry.

"No. Just another bump, I guess. But it hurts. I've got to get back to my squadron as soon as possible. Can you get a side car?"

"Surest thing you know. But the Captain wants to see you first. He says this is the first evidence he has had that there are any aviators in this war."

It was the usual taunt of the ground men, who were forever claiming that the air service was a good safe place to spend the war. The taunt stung. Red flared in anger.

"Is that so!" he shot back. "Well, you can tell your captain for me that the next time I go to war I'm going to be an artilleryman and play safe."

"Really!" said the lieutenant. "I'd rather you'd tell him that. He is a little touchy on the subject. In fact, I rather think he considers the artillery quite hazardous and somewhat important. Silly theory, maybe, but he clings to it. Come along. I don't like to stay out here in the open. Something might happen." He turned to look at the plane, lying upside down with bent wheels in the air. "My word, but you had all the luck," he said.

"Yeah, and all of it bad," Red grouched. "Ouch!" he exclaimed as he arose. "There's something wrong with my side. Give me a hand, will you?"

Together they made their way across the field and into the wood. Every step hurt, but Red kept a stiff upper lip. It wouldn't do to complain in the presence of this swanky artilleryman. They might rush him to a doctor and he wanted nothing from them but some sort of transportation back to the squadron.

A little trail ran through the woods to a dugout. Off to one side were camouflaged gun positions, so cleverly concealed that Red would have missed them entirely had not the lieutenant pointed them out. A captain of artillery was at the entrance to the dugout.

Red saluted. "Well, Captain, I am paying you an unexpected call."

"Quite. I'd much rather you would arrive in some other manner. We just moved into this position and as yet the Hun has not spotted us. We saw the fight. Blood-thirsty rascals, aren't they?"

"Somewhat. Can I get a side car to take me back to the squadron?"

"In about an hour—when the messenger gets back from headquarters. Who's your commander?"

"Major Minton, sir."

"Minton? Really? I know him well. He was with us down in the Ypres salient six or eight months ago. He was a Second Lieutenant then, and so was I. Those were great days. Please remember me to him. My name is Dunning."

"Thank you, I will. My name is McGee. Mind if I sit down, Captain? I'm a bit shaken up."

"I dare say. By Jove! This is a coincidence. My battery seems to have an attraction for falling McGees."

"Yes? How is that?"

"Down in the Ypres salient we had a balloon observer by that name attached to our command. Clever fellow, too, and with a most extraw'dinary nerve. Every time he went up he drew fire like a magnet. They shot down his bag twice in one day and he wanted to go right up again."

Red gasped in surprise and then held his side in pain.

"Are you hurt?" the captain asked.

"No, no! It's nothing. Go on—please."

"Well, I say the blighter wanted to go up again in another bag. He seemed to jolly well like the game of jumping out of those kites."

"That was duck soup to him," Red commented half aloud, his eyes looking far away and seeing nothing.

"Duck soup? What's that?"

"It was easy—for him. His game, you know. Was his first name Dan?"

"By Jove, I think it was. They called him Yank. He insisted he was English, but he talked like a Yankee."

"That's the man."

"You knew him, then?"

"He was my brother."

"No? By Jove! Extraw'dinary. Well, well! I say!" and the amazed captain was quite incapable of completing what he had to say.

"How was he—did you see him shot down?" Red asked, trying hard to control his feelings and to steel himself against the information he had long wanted and now dreaded hearing.

"I say! This is a bit thick. Better come down and have a shot of rum, old fellow. It will sort of buck you up, you know."

"No thanks. Go on—tell me how it happened."

"He jolly well deserved a medal for what he did, but so far as I know all he got was a wooden cross. He was ill with a cold and had been ordered evacuated to a hospital that very morning. We were concentrating our fire on an enemy position and another observer was up in a kite spotting fire for us. Visibility was good, though there were clouds overhead. We had Archies trained to protect the bag, but a Hun came out of the clouds and ran the gauntlet. The observer jumped and we began hauling in the bag. The Hun overshot the bag and decided to call it a day when the Archies opened on him. When the observer hit the ground he failed to spill the wind out of the 'chute and was dragged over a stone fence. It broke his arm. McGee heard of it, got out of his bunk and reported for duty. Ill or no, he was determined to see the job through. You couldn't argue with that fellow."

"I know," Red nodded. "Danny had his own ideas."

"He did that! Up he went. That time two Huns came out of those clouds. One of them got the bag. McGee jumped in plenty of time, but one of those bloody Huns had his heart set on meat. He followed McGee down, shooting as he came. Two bullets struck him, and either one was enough. He landed almost on top of my battery position—and he was dead when we reached him."

"And the Hun—he got away?" Red asked.

"Oh, yes. The Archies were busy enough, but you know the chances. And that fellow was a real flyer. I was watching both planes with my glasses when they dived and the one that followed McGee down came in for a fine bit of machine gun strafing from the ground. He just waved his hand and zoomed. Not very sporting, following a chap down like that, what?"

"Not very," Red said, biting off the words. "I'd give a lot to meet him—alone, in the air. Do you know where they buried Danny, Captain?"

"Why, yes, I do. It was south of Ypres, about ten kilos. By the way, I believe I have one of the old sectors maps in my duffle. If so, I can show you the place exactly. Wait here a moment."

The Captain went down the dugout steps, leaving Red in the company of the Lieutenant. Red sat in silence, still looking far off.

"It is a little world, isn't it?" said the Lieutenant, sensing Red's depression and feeling that something should be said.

"It is," Red agreed, his eyes narrowed. "And it is getting smaller every minute. From now on it isn't going to be big enough for me and any Hun I happen to meet."

"Right-o!" said the Lieutenant. "I wish you luck."

The Captain came back up the steps. "Here you are," he said, unfolding a map. "See this contour line here? That marks a little hillside. Not much of an elevation, but he was buried there. Quite a little graveyard there. It was a rotten sector."

"Do you have any further need for that map?" Red asked.

"Why, no. I've kept a copy of the maps of my sectors as a sort of record, you know."

"Might I have that one?"

"Of course."

"Just draw a circle around the place, will you?"

"Certainly. The scale is rather large and I may miss it a bit, but not far." He took a pencil from his pocket and drew a small circle on the map. "There. That's near it. Near enough for you to locate it if you ever get down that way."

Red took the map. "Thank you, Captain. I'll get there some day."

"Not if you keep sticking your nose in the ground like you did a bit ago. Those beggars nearly got you. Hullo! There comes the side car."

"Failing to get me was at least one mistake they made," Red said. "From now on I'm out to collect the difference. Thanks for the lift, Captain. They'll be up after the plane later."

"Right-o! Nice of you to drop in this way."

"Wasn't it?" Red answered, forcing a smile.

CHAPTER XII

HARE AND HOUND

The first half of the trip back to the squadron by side car was over roads made painfully rough by the heavy traffic of war. Here and there was a shell hole to be avoided; there were pools of water through which the motorcycle dashed as though it were a torpedo destroyer; there were turns in the road which the orderly felt called upon to make without reducing speed.

Red held his side and groaned. He was sure that the orderly was trying to give him a thrill. One word of complaint and that poor nut would swagger around headquarters for the rest of the war telling how he put the wind up a R. F. C. pilot.

When they got farther back on good roads the orderly let out more speed.

"Flying is a bit dangerous, isn't it, Lieutenant?" the orderly broke the long silence.

"Comparatively, no," Red answered dryly.

That ended the conversation for the time being. At last Red spoke up.

"Would you mind trying to miss a few of the bumps?" he asked. "I think I have a broken rib. Speed doesn't mean much to me, you know. I'm used to it."

"I'm sorry, sir. I didn't know you were hurt."

"Then forget about it when we get to the squadron. I'm O. K. See?"

The orderly smiled approvingly and reduced speed. "Right, sir," he said.

Riding in a little more comfort, Red's thoughts turned from his pain to the embarrassment of having to acknowledge a crash. Doubtless Major Minton would be quite bored. The thought of Minton brought other things to mind. The artillery captain had said that Minton had been with him down in the Ypres salient. Could that have been at the time Danny was killed? And if so, did Minton also know Dan?

It was a disturbing thought. It might be that the Major knew a great deal more than he cared to talk about.

The side car at last reached the squadron headquarters. Red climbed stiffly from the car, winced with pain, then squared his shoulders with firm resolution and walked straight to Major Minton's quarters.

Minton sat at a long table working over a report. He looked up in surprise as Red entered.

"Hullo, there, McGee! We'd about given you up. What happened to you?"

"Two Huns came down on me and got in a shot that conked the engine. I cracked up. Have you heard from Larkin, sir?"

"Yes. He got a bone broken in his hand and a hard crack on his knee. He's in the hospital and called up the Wing. He said you stayed with him until he got over the line. That's why we couldn't account for you."

"Then he isn't hurt badly?"

"No, not according to the report from Wing. Too bad, though. A crack up the first time out sometimes breaks the nerves and—"

"You don't know Larkin, sir. He'll be back, mad as a wet hen and better than ever."

"I hope so. What about you? Hurt?"

"No, sir."

"How about the black eye?"

"Is my eye black?" Red reached up to feel of it.

"Higher," the Major directed. "Along the brow."

"Oh! That's from a little bump I got on the head." He lifted his helmet.

"*Little* bump! Lord, man, it is as big as a goose egg. How did you get that?"

"I dunno. Must have struck something when she went over on her nose. Am I grounded, Major, or do I get another ship?"

"You do, indeed. And a decoration if I have anything to do with it."

"Decoration? What for?" Red asked, puzzled and wondering if the Major was spoofing him.

"Oh, for valor, and that sort of thing," the Major answered. "I saw you go after that blighter that was on Larkin's tail when you had another on your own. You offered all you had to save a friend, and one can't do any more. I have made out the report and recommendation. I was merely waiting to see whether it should be posthumous."

"Are you joking, Major?"

"Indeed not. Many a D. F. C. has been given for less."

"But that was nothing. I couldn't wear a decoration given for that. Buzz was in a pretty fix. I had to go, you know."

"*You* did, yes. But I've been in the air a long time and it isn't often that a chap doesn't save his own skin first. Besides," the Major smiled broadly, "I am frightfully obligated to you for leading that Hun over under me. You saw him go down?"

"I should say I did. I never felt quite so happy about anything. I'm sorry I got forced down on my way home."

"Tell me about it."

Red told the whole story, omitting only that part of the artillery captain's conversation concerning a

certain Dan McGee. That was a matter in which silence seemed both a great virtue and a great discretion. He even hoped that it would be a long time before the artillery officer and the Major renewed their acquaintance. If not until the end of the war that would be quite soon enough.

His heart did a complete flip-flop when in delivering the artillery captain's compliments the Major casually said:

"Oh, yes, Captain Dunning and I come from the same town. Fine fellow, what?"

"Yes, sir," Red agreed rather weakly and forthwith sought an exit from the Major's presence. If they ever got together again—

As he walked toward his billet he felt cold and shaky. Just what would they do with a man for serving under another name? Of course there must be many others serving under assumed names, but perhaps they did not run so great a chance of being caught. It might be best to—

"McGee! Oh, McGee!"

It was Battleship Russell's bull-like voice, bellowing from the door of one of the hangars. "Where is your ship?"

Again Red was forced to a recital of the painful story.

"Serves you right," Russell growled. "Did you ever hear anything about staying in formation?"

"Why, yes, but—"

"But nothing! You dived on that Rumpler and sucked the whole works down."

"I thought you were looking for a scrap."

"Scrap!" Russell roared. "Yes, but not on the carpet. If I hadn't followed you down that would have been the end of one McGee. You can't give away altitude like that and get away with it."

"We did, didn't we?"

Russell started to answer, grew red in the face and seemed about to explode. It was not the first time he had been faced by a new pilot with exalted ideas about winning the war.

"All right," he said when he had gained control, "you can point to success this time, but the next time you dive out of formation before I give the signal you'll arrange beforehand to take care of your own funeral."

Red was too wise to push the point further.

"I'll try to remember," he said, meekly enough.

"Try? What's hard about that?"

"Simply that I forget everything when I see a Hun, that's all. The Major said I was to have another plane and that a crew was to be sent over after my ship. They'll have to get her out after night."

"Field repair?" Russell asked.

"Hardly. But she isn't a complete washout. Where's the armament officer?"

"Wait a minute. I want to see the Major before you take any more ships up with me."

"Oh, all right," said Red, wearily. "See the Major."

An hour later Russell stuck his head in the door of Red's quarters and bellowed: "I say! McGee!"

Red was lying on the bed, trying to find the position that was the least painful to his aching side. He arose slowly, and with a grimace.

"Better go over to the hangar and help those mechanics check over your new bus. You're to fly McCready's plane until he gets back from the hospital—or until your own gets patched up."

"What happened to McCready?" Red asked. "You know I haven't heard all the news."

"A machine gun bullet just nipped his shoulder but he stayed in the scrap, got a Hun and then tooled her home. He is as game as they make 'em. Shake a leg. To-morrow is another day—and if you use your head you may live through it."

"Did you see the Major?" Red asked.

Russell frowned, but offered no answer.

"What did he say?" Red demanded, pursuing the point.

"He said enough," Russell replied. "He politely informed me that he was recommending you for a decoration and when I grouched about your diving out of formation he merely said, 'Oh, yes, but he

has a very good reason.' I pushed him for the reason and he closed up like a trap. What did he mean by that?"

"I wonder," Red answered as he passed through the door and started toward the hangar.

* * * * *

The following morning Red was so stiff that he could scarcely drag himself from his bed. The top of his head was as sore as a boil and his side seemed as creaky as a rusty hinge. The simple task of getting into his flying suit was difficult, laborious and painful. He began to wonder if it were not foolhardy for him to go out on patrol while in such condition, but the thought was banished by the realization that other members of the squadron would be watching him to see if yesterday's disaster had in any way affected his nerve.

He fairly dragged himself across the 'drome and into McCready's plane. Russell came over for a last admonition.

"Remember now, I want you to stay in formation," he said.

Red nodded. He had no intention of doing anything else. That aching side wouldn't stand any funny business.

"You can do a safety patrol for all I care," he said. "I'll follow you."

Russell looked at him quizzically. It didn't

sound like McGee. But then, perhaps the lesson had been learned.

Red had every intention of staying in formation, and even thought it a little strange that for the moment at least he had lost all lust for battle.

They crossed the line at ten thousand feet, then swung north toward the coast. The sky was free of clouds, the heavens as blue as a rain washed robin's egg, and the sun swinging up from the far eastern rim of the earth was colorless even at this early hour. Visibility was excellent.

They sighted a flight of Sopwiths coming up toward the lines, mothering a two-seater on a photographic mission, but no enemy was in sight.

Up near the coast some Archie batteries got busy but Russell soon led the flight out of the fire and turned south. The ability of Archie fire to prove harassing depended entirely upon the skill of the individual gunner. Some batteries were exceedingly good, while others seemed as unskilled as a group of girls casting stones at a mark. They missed by almost the widest angle possible. An Archie burst close under a plane has telling effect upon the nerves of that particular pilot. The detonation rocks the plane and flying fragments of jagged steel whistling through the air in search of a mark are at least worthy of respect.

As they flew south Red noticed that ever so often

Russell turned his head to give him a look. He smiled. There was no need for alarm. He had no intention whatever of leaving that formation. Indeed, he would be quite pleased if no enemy appeared.

The thought had hardly passed through his mind when he sighted a single plane, away to the southwest, working up from Dixmude toward Furnes. Red watched it closely, trying to make out the type. At last it swung a little, tilting its wings so that the morning sun played upon them. It was a Boche and from this distance appeared to be a single seater.

At once Red forgot all about the pain in his side, his resolution and Russell's orders. Battle fire flamed within him. Before his eyes came a picture of a German plane circling a descending parachute and stabbing at the helpless occupant with tracer bullets.

Yonder flew an enemy, alone and unprotected, save by his own skill. It would be plane against plane, skill against skill, luck against luck.

Red dived out of formation as though he had never heard of such a thing. Nor did he look back to see how his action affected the flight. They were completely out of his mind. He could see but one thing—a distant Hun that had not yet sighted him.

The German plane had now changed its course,

swinging southward toward Hondschoote. He gave no sign that he had sighted Russell's flight. Red gloated. If that Hun did not look around he would soon have bullets streaking about his ears.

Just when Red's hopes were at the highest the German pilot turned his head. The speed with which he reversed his direction and started for the Fatherland indicated that he was not seeking combat. Of course such action might not reflect the man's personal courage. Quite likely he was out on a mission with orders to avoid contact with the enemy. If so, he was making every effort to obey his orders, while Red, on the other hand, was breaking orders.

It developed into a merry chase. Red had superior speed, and enough altitude to increase that speed tremendously if he came close enough to dive down on the tail of the fleeing plane.

Far back over the lines, with Red still gaining, the German turned suddenly. Such action deserved consideration. Red had kept his eyes glued upon the quarry but now he looked up. Two Albatrosses, above and to the east, were coming to the rescue. Three against one! The odds were too great. The hound must become the hare.

Here, Red thought with a grin, was a fine time to remember orders. Now he could see the wisdom in them and he longed for the safety of formation.

He executed a tight Immelmann, said a prayer which began and ended with "O Lord!" and gave her a full gun.

A few minutes disclosed that the enemy planes were not gaining but they held to the chase. Scanning the sky ahead and above, Red picked up a flight of four planes at several thousand feet above his line of flight. Beyond question it was Russell's flight.

Red glanced back. The pursuing planes were still holding to the chase. A thought flashed through his mind: Since he had gotten himself into trouble by keeping his eyes riveted on a fleeing plane, why not trap the enemy the same way?

The thought brought a grim smile. He had gone after meat and would bring home the bacon. He cut down on the throttle. Tease them along; let them get a little closer. If he could bring hope of victory into the hearts of those pursuing pilots he might lead them under Russell's flight.

He kept a keen weather eye to the rear. They were gaining now. If they had sighted Russell's flight they made no sign. Their eyes were on the quarry. Still, they might look up any minute. Red nosed over a little. This would keep them looking down as they followed.

The plan worked beautifully and Red judged the distance nicely. Just before he swept under the

upper flight one of the German pilots warmed his guns. The tracers went wide of the mark, but it was time to change tactics.

Red glanced up. He saw Russell's plane swerve from the former direction and dive to the attack. The three other Nieuports came thundering down behind him.

Red advanced his throttle, pulled over in a tight reversement and when around pulled the stick into his stomach as he zoomed up under the belly of the leading Albatross. There, he was on! He thumbed the trigger. The Lewis gun kept going until Red was forced to nose over to avoid a stall. It was long enough.

The Albatross slipped off on the wing, tried to manoeuver and for a moment held its place as an injured butterfly battles vainly to keep the air. Then again it slipped, went over on the nose and went down spinning, out of control.

Red watched until it struck the ground, far below. A cloud of smoke and flame shot upward.

Three!

The two other planes had sought escape but it was too late. Russell sent one down and the three other pilots chased the third one until they overtook him and sent him down in flames.

The central melee lasted but a minute. It had been swift work. The planes reformed and began

climbing. Back in position, Red was exultant and quite unmindful of any pain in his side. What a wonderful toxin was victory!

When they had finished climbing Russell dropped back alongside Red's plane and by certain signs made it plain that he was not nearly so pleased as might be expected. He pointed his finger at his own head and revolved it in eccentric circles.

Wheels in the head, eh?

"Why, you big bimbo!" Red roared, quite forgetting that his words were lost in the rush of air and roar of motors. "What do you want for your money? Want 'em served up on a platter?"

And Russell was saying: "You wild American half-wit! This will spoil you completely. You'll think you can always have that kind of luck."

Then he took his place back in the lead of the patrol.

When they landed at the field and taxied up to the line, Russell climbed stiffly from his cockpit and without a word went bowling off toward the Major's quarters.

There he reported the fight in some heat and his remarks about Red were not complimentary.

"Well, what do you want?" the Major asked, failing to show the proper indignation over a breach of discipline.

"I want men in my flight who will obey orders,"

Russell retorted. "Tactics, not foolishness, will win this war."

"Very well, I will take him in my flight," the Major said. "Of course I will discipline him, but I doubt if it will do any good. You know, Lieutenant, every so often the air service develops great individual fighters. We had Ball and Hawker. The French do this perhaps better than we. The Germans have developed several such fighters—Boelcke, Richthofen and others. Such men are leaders, not followers. They violate pretty theories and we call it luck when they get away with it. But as a matter of fact they have something which others want—a sure instinct that is far more valuable than reason. I think McGee is just such a pilot."

What was the use? Russell thought. The red-head had even succeeded in capturing Minton. Well, let it ride. He would dive out of formation once too often. That was the trouble with these hot spurs—they became too confident, too sure of their skill and in the end came a cropper, shot down by some novice who was out for his first flight with his heart in his mouth.

Russell determined to hold his peace. For a week he succeeded in this endeavor despite the fact that Red continued to quit formation every time he sighted the enemy. By the end of that week he had rolled up five more victories—his eighth

now. Each one gave him a greater confidence, though at the end of each fight he came home silent and contrite, offering stumbling apologies for forgetting orders.

But in bringing down his ninth E. A. (enemy aircraft) he plunged the flight into such a merry huffing match that Russell came back to the 'drome in high dudgeon and again stormed into Minton's quarters demanding that something be done to cool Red's ardor.

Minton listened with forced patience.

"Let's see," he said, musing. "This makes his ninth victory, does it not?"

"Call it victory if you like," Russell challenged. "I call it luck."

"Any name will do. But the fact remains that he has brought down nine planes. On the books he is no longer on the debit side. I know that he is impulsive, but he is also quite fearless. Then, too, he has a rather good reason for getting a bit upset every time he sights a Hun."

"You have told me that before. What reason?"

Major Minton toyed with a pencil as little lines of tolerant understanding came to the corners of his eyes and his mouth.

"Oh, one can never tell just what is in the back of a chap's mind," he answered.

Russell knew that it was an evasion. "I'm glad

to know that he has something in his mind," he grousched.

"See here, Russell. Be easy with the lad. He is an American, you know, and he came into this thing before his own country entered. Does that mean anything to you?"

"No."

"Doesn't set you to wondering why?"

"No."

"Well, well! Let it stand there. But if he doesn't get the D. F. C. from my recommendation, then there is no justice. Of course I will give him a chance to cool his heels on the ground a bit. Proper respect for discipline, you know, and that sort of thing. I will assign another pilot to your flight."

"No!" Russell bellowed in a bull-like voice which thinly masked his true emotions. "No, I'll keep him. Blast him, I like him. I don't know whether it's his smile, his freckles, or that mop of red hair that gets under my skin. I was only trying to get you to read him the riot act. If I were not three times his size I'd break his blooming neck. As it is I just feel sorry for him. He's such a hot-headed, poor little—poor little—"

"Shrimp, I think they call him," the Major completed. "And you had better look sharp or the 'Little Shrimp' will roll up more victories than the 'Battleship.' "

"Humph! I'll be at his funeral within a week if he doesn't change his tactics."

"Not within a week," the Major shook his head. "I'm going to ground him for exactly a week."

Russell sat down rather heavily. "Oh, I say now! Don't do that. Why, the little blighter will blame me for it. I wasn't complaining, you know, just—"

"Send him to me," the Major interrupted a little tartly. "I'll give him a shaking up. I think a week will do it."

"Oh, I say now!"

"You want discipline, don't you? Very well, you shall have it. That is all, Lieutenant. Send him along."

"But Major! He'll be poisonous at the end of a week."

"Very well. In fact, I want him to be quite anxious to get into the air again."

CHAPTER XIII

GROUNDED

Red smarted under the discipline of being grounded, but tried bravely to conceal his chagrin. It wouldn't do to howl too much before the English. They would fail to understand it. They accepted things with a shrug of the shoulders and a stoical complacency. They played the game.

On the third day Buzz Larkin came up from the hospital in a staff car, one hand swathed in bandages and his cracked knee favored by a crutch which was handled in a most awkward fashion. He stopped at Minton's quarters to make a brief report of progress and then limped across the 'drome to Red's billet.

It was a joyful reunion. "You old son-of-a-gun!" Buzz greeted Red. "The Major tells me you're going to get a D. F. C. for what you did for me."

"Bunk! Pure bunk! I don't want any medals for a thing like that. All I want is to fly. But what do I get? Grounded. All because that big sausage Russell thinks the war can be won by flying

around in pretty formations. He gives me a pain."

"He told me about it over at headquarters," Buzz said. "He seemed quite cut up about it. He likes you, Shrimp."

"Yeah? Well, I like him too, to be honest, but he shows his friendship in a funny way. I hope he gets a wart on his nose. He has been in the air long enough to be a flight commander and has only eleven victories. But boy! Can he fly? Like a bird. But what does he do? Goes out and flies up and down like he was on parade. Formation, formation! That's all he can think of. He should have joined the infantry."

"How long are you grounded for?" Buzz asked.

"I don't know. I asked the Major and all he said was, 'We'll see.'"

"Oh, well, don't take it too hard, Shrimp. It will be another week before I get back up here, and maybe longer. You're far enough ahead of me now. I think you've cracked the record for the short time you have had at the front and all I have done is to crack a ship, my knee and a bone in my hand. Lady Luck is camping on your trail."

But Red did not consider it good luck to be grounded. Every morning and evening he watched the patrols go out, fretting and chafing until their return. On the sixth day of enforced inactivity he went to Major Minton with a plea to be restored to

flying duty. But he was careful not to make any promises. He knew that at the first sight of a Hun he would forget all about discipline. So, wisely, he merely asked to be restored.

The Major was attentive and kindly. When Red had finished his earnest but non-committal request, Minton turned to a drawer and drew forth a bundle of papers, running through them until he came to one that held his attention for a long minute.

"McGee," he spoke at last, "I see by your record that you did some night flying while in school."

"Yes, sir. At first there was a chance of my being made a bomber. Quick as I saw where the wind was blowing I developed a lot of things they couldn't stand in a bomber."

"But you had no accidents?"

"No, sir."

"Like it?"

"Well—it's interesting."

"Like to do some more of it?"

Red felt his heart sinking. They were going to transfer him to a squadron of night bombers and he would have to go through another school. It was a tough break. After all this talk about medals, and all that he had gone through. . . .

"Would you like to do a little more of it?" Major Minton repeated with some impatience.

"Bombing, sir? No. I'd hate it. I want to—"

"I said nothing about bombing. I asked if you'd like to do some night flying. See here—you want to fly, don't you?"

"More than anything in the world."

"And if you could render a very great service you would do it, of course?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Right-o! I'm going to give you a chance. Frankly, I do not believe you will ever do well under Russell." He paused to observe the effect of the statement. Red again felt his heart sinking. "But," the Major continued, "I do think you will make a great success as an individual. I could ground you permanently, and by so doing preserve our sense of proper discipline and so on. But it would also rob us of your usefulness. You simply do not understand our way of doing things. You may even think that it isn't your war any—"

"But it is, sir. America is in it now."

"Oh, yes, of course. I mean that you don't feel about it as we do. We are in dead earnest about it. With you it is something of a lark."

"No, sir." Red protested. "I am here to—"

"To even a score," Minton completed.

Red felt his cheeks getting hot.

"You mean—"

"That I know all about the first Dan McGee—your brother."

To Red's eyes everything in the room became blurred and lost all detail. His legs seemed to lose their strength and threatened to buckle under him. The Major's level eyes told him that denial were worse than useless.

"Well, anyway, I got nine of 'em," Red heard himself saying and was somewhat startled by its irrelevance.

"And I hope you get more." Minton's words seemed to be coming from afar off but they served to bring Red back from the mental chaos of fear into which his mind had plunged.

"You mean—that you—won't say anything about it?"

"Certainly not. Why should I? It is no affair of mine if you choose to become Dan McGee. Certainly you have as good a right to the name as anyone."

Whew! That was that.

"When did you—find out?" Red asked haltingly.

"The day the crew went up after the plane which you set down almost on top of Captain Dunning's battery. You made one mistake. You shouldn't have relayed his compliments. I suppose he failed to tell you that we come from the same town. Boys together, you know. So I went up with the crew for a little chinning. While they were salvaging the plane I paid him a call. Clear enough?"

"Quite," said Red. Then after a moment's thought, "But I didn't tell him that I had taken my brother's name."

"No. Nor did I. I merely listened. You know, when an Englishman comes into the service we recognize him as another member of the family trying to put out the fire. But the day you were sent up to this squadron I began to wonder just what had led you into the game before your country's entrance. I have the answer. It is a trite saying, but none the less true, that the world is a small place after all."

"Too small," Red agreed with pronounced earnestness.

"This is your secret," the Major went on, "and yours alone. I have quite forgotten it. Let us get back to the business in hand. I have a great confidence in your flying ability. Russell says it is luck, but I don't agree. As I have said, I think you function better when thrown on your own resources. Leading those Huns back under Russell was a clever trick. You made them make the same mistake you had made. Just now we need a resourceful flyer who is willing to take a deucedly long shot—and make good on it. Are you willing to try?"

"Yes, sir," Red answered, committing himself without hesitation and without asking questions.

"Top hole!" Minton exclaimed. "For the next three days I want you to do as much time as possible in a two-seater that will be sent up here this evening or at latest to-morrow morning. I want you to get the feel of this particular ship—know her like a book. You are going to have to put her down on a strange field, at night, take off as best you can and get back home as fast as possible. Everything depends on you. If you put her down a little too hard—*fini la guerre pour vous*."

"You mean—a secret mission?" Red asked.

"Exactly. You still say yes?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Come to me to-night for further instruction. Mark you, not a word to anyone. Absolute secrecy is the price of success in such endeavors."

"Maybe I shouldn't be trusted, Major. I let out one secret, you know."

"But the penalty wasn't a firing squad. In this case it is. To-night, at eight."

Red saluted smartly, did an about face with military precision and walked from the room. It was something to be chosen to go on a secret mission.

He went directly to his quarters and there, lying stretched out on his bunk, let his mind wander through all of the fanciful and imaginative thrills that come to one contemplating an undertaking where death is the penalty of failure.

He had heard many tales told of "secret missions," but they were always so lacking in detail and substance that he had thought them little more than fabrications woven on the loom of a highly imaginative mind. They were vague stories, coming second hand, with the central characters either lacking or veiled by anonymity.

Now he himself was to go out on such an adventure, and however high its hazard, however filled with thrills, he must always keep the tale to himself. He recalled rumors he had heard about certain men who wore decorations for some valorous deed, the nature of which no one seemed fully advised. A secret mission, to be successful, depends upon absolute secrecy. When accomplished, it is something about which one may not talk, for proof is lacking.

Lying there on his bunk Red went through all the drama of the coming adventure. In a few nights he would take off from the field under cover of darkness, carrying as passenger some army officer who would be disguised as a Flemish laborer, or perhaps as an ordinary Belgian citizen, or even as a German officer or common soldier of the line. That man, as a spy, would be a linguist sufficiently skilled in German and in Flemish to fool even the most observing, but if captured behind the lines he could expect nothing but death at the hands of the enemy.

Once in the air it would be Red's task to fly far behind the enemy lines, bring the plane down to some field previously selected, make a perfect landing, discharge his passenger and again take off. Then, a few nights later, he must return to that same field, pick up his passenger and again return.

The possibilities for error and failure were so numerous as to be staggering. By compass, and by an instinctive sense of direction, he must find a field which he had never seen except as it would be described to him by photographs and military maps. His flying speed, wind direction, drift—all must be calculated to a hair. On a pitch black night he must find that field and make a perfect landing. A miss of a hundred yards might prove fatal. Not only must he make the trip once, but he must tempt fate and luck a second time. His passenger, who was offering his life in a service which no nation respects as legitimate, must be brought back. Failing this, his life would be forfeit and what information he had gained would die with him.

Red began to doubt his ability to carry through. It was a great trust. They had given him one of the most difficult tasks in the air service. A man was staking his life on a pilot's skill—and on luck! The high command, playing for a prize great enough to warrant such risk, was placing everything in his

hands. If he succeeded, no one would ever know. What succeeded once might succeed again, and the enemy must never know. If, on the other hand, failure came, the army must keep a still tongue. The spy, if apprehended, would not live through another day. If something should happen to the plane and the pilot was captured he would suffer the same fate as the spy, regardless of the fact that he was wearing a uniform. An accessory to the deed would be treated in the same light as the principal.

These were not pleasant thoughts, nor were they easy to escape. At mess that night Red was even more silent and taciturn than was his wont. His appetite, always hearty, was strangely wanting. The talk at the mess table held no interest. His comrades, laughing and jesting at the end of a danger-filled day, would on the morrow again go out to joust with death. Perhaps they faced as great a danger as Red would face when he set forth on the secret mission, but they had the great advantage of meeting death in clean daylight, as soldiers, sportsmen and gentlemen. A spy dies against a wall—as a dog dies.

At eight o'clock Red went to Major Minton's quarters, glad that the hours of waiting and speculation were at an end. At least he would now learn something definite; be given something to work up-

on. Fancy, filled with forebodings and fearful bogies, could be routed by a clear mind working on the detail of the task.

"You are still willing to undertake this thing?" Minton asked.

"Yes, sir."

"You know the danger?"

"Yes, sir."

"You realize that if you fail you cannot look to us for aid?"

Red nodded.

"And if you succeed you may never get any official acknowledgment?" the Major continued.

"I have thought of all that," Red said. "In fact, I have thought of a great many things that I want to quit thinking about. Give me some facts to work on."

The Major walked across the room and bolted the door. Returning to his desk he took out a folder containing some typewritten reports and a group of aerial photographs.

For two hours they worked over the photographs and the reports. No detail was overlooked. The landing place selected was a large piece of pasture land, sloping gently eastward toward a large forest—the Foret D'Houthulst. It was several kilometers behind the lines and, so far as could be determined by aerial observation and photographs, unmarked

by shell fire. It was about eight kilometers from Roulers. Since it is the custom of French and Belgian farmers to reside in the little towns and go out each day to their farms, there was an even chance that a plane could make a silent landing without anyone being the wiser.

"But," the Major said in the course of the instructions, "there is also an even chance that the Germans have trapped that field. Or there may be some guards stationed there. They know that we have done this same thing in the past. We know that they have worked the same thing on us. We have done nothing to prevent them from doing it again. But the German is methodical and thorough-going. He could wire that field, at no great cost or labor, and our photographs would fail to disclose this. Two months ago it was clear."

"How do you know that?" Red asked.

Minton smiled. "One of our pilots landed there. See, here is a rather full report on it. I want you to read it carefully when you get time. It is a splendid example of how a good pilot can aid his country by a proper, intelligent report."

"I should think he would be the man to send," Red said. "He knows all about—"

"All about life after death," Minton said. "He was killed last month."

"On a mission of—of this nature?"

"No. Shot down in perfectly orthodox fashion."

"I hope I have the same luck," Red said, and then they both laughed, thereby relieving the tension under which they had been working.

"A perfect Irish bull," Minton said.

"Well, I suppose a McGee has a right to make a few of them. Anything else to-night, Major?"

"No. The two-seater will be brought up to-morrow morning. Then get busy. I have spread the rumor that you are to be transferred to another squadron to do photographic work. Don't be surprised if some of the boys offer their condolences. In any case, say nothing."

"Trust me for that. By the way, Major, who is going with me?"

"That is yet a part of the secret. He will come up on the night of the mission."

"Just what are they after?"

The Major shook his head. "That, too, is their secret. I was given the task of finding a pilot for the mission. You have your objective. He will come here pledged to secrecy. I daresay he would answer no questions, even should we be foolish enough to ask them. On such missions one hesitates to trust even those wearing the same uniform. We have caught spies serving under our flag, but not all of them. Knowing that, he will keep a close mouth. Our job is to take him over, put him down, and

then go back for him on the night he directs. He will give these orders to you alone. What you learn you will keep. You will report to me only for whatever assistance you may need. I will help you plan the flight and give you the benefit of all that I have learned. But after you are once started, then the thing is in your hands."

"And on the lap of the gods," Red added. "Kismet!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE SECRET MISSION

Three nights thereafter, at a little past eleven o'clock, Red left his quarters and walked hurriedly across the field toward Major Minton's quarters. A little crescent moon, low in the west, gave feeble light. In less than an hour it would be gone. Here and there fleecy clouds dappled the blue-black dome of heaven and there was a light sky haze that robbed the stars of their brilliance and made them formless points of light.

Red noticed that three men were rolling the two-seater out on the tarmac. He started to go over to them with some last minute instructions, thought better of it and continued to the Major's quarters. He heard subdued voices on the inside as he knocked lightly on the door.

"Who's there?" Minton called.

"Lieutenant McGee, sir."

A chair scraped on the floor. Footsteps sounded; a bolt was thrown back and the door opened.

"Come in, McGee."

Red entered, blinked a little in the glow of candle light and then stopped short. A black robed priest sat near the Major's work table, his black, flat round hat pulled over on one side in a most unchurchman-like manner.

Red turned and glanced quickly at the Major. This man was no army chaplain and Minton was not known as a particularly religious man.

"Did I come too soon?" Red asked, glancing at his wrist watch.

"No, no. Just right."

"But—" he nodded toward the priest, who sat with his back turned to the door.

Minton laughed. "Fair enough, Charles," he called out. "Even your pilot, who comes here expecting a passenger, is fooled by the disguise."

The man turned and smiled. Red noted that his face was round, full and ruddy, and his smile was as benevolent as that of any holy man. From his neck swung a rosary. Large, square-toed shoes poked out from under the long robe.

The man lifted a finger, made the sign of the cross and said, laughing, "Blessings, my son. I hope everyone I meet will be as easily fooled. Your name is McGee?"

"Yes—sir."

"Forget the 'sir.' For our purposes my name is Black. It is as good as any, and it fits my costume

and, the enemy would think, my work. Your plane is ready?"

"It was being rolled out as I came along."

"And you?"

"Ready."

"Good. Go out and warm your motor, then taxi over to this side of the field. I will join you there and we will be off. I do not want to go near the hangars. Of course you have been given all instruction?"

"All except when I am to return for you."

"Three nights from now—over the field at midnight. If all is clear—and I am there—I will give you a dash, dot, dash, from a flashlight at intervals of thirty seconds. Do not come down to any other signal. They may capture me, may even attempt to signal you to lure you down. But the time element will be the test. Remember, a dash, dot and dash every thirty seconds after I catch sound of your motor above me. If I am not there at midnight, you will come back here and return on the following night. Then, should I chance not to be there—" he paused and shrugged his shoulders, "then you need not come again. The two nights provide against accident or delay to either of us. A third one would be of no value. Is that clear?"

"Yes."

"Is the moon down yet?"

"It will be, soon."

"Then let's be off as soon as possible. Go now. I want a last word with Geo— with the Major."

Red turned to go. Minton walked with him to the door.

"McGee," he said, speaking low and with a suppressed emotion which Red had never before noticed in his voice, "this is a vital undertaking. Success means everything. It is a great service and—well, I am expecting you to carry through."

Red started to speak, decided that any word would be idle, and gripped the hand that Minton offered. That grip said more than words could ever say.

A mechanic was standing guard at the plane.

"All set, Williams?" Red asked.

"Yes, sir. You checked her yourself, didn't you, sir?"

"You can bet on it! But that was two hours ago. No one has touched her since?"

"You can bet on that, too, sir. Of course Mullins and Reed helped roll her out."

"You put that small can of gas in the cockpit?"

"I did, sir. What's it for, may I ask, sir?"

"To drink," Red answered tersely as he climbed into the cockpit.

A moment later the motor caught and roared, shattering the still calm of the night. Red cut down on the gun, letting her turn over slowly for

a little while. Then he adjusted his helmet with a determined pull, advanced the throttle and taxied over to the far side of the field. A dark-robed figure came out from the shadows of the trees, crossed the opening with hurried strides and climbed aboard with an agility not usually found in wearers of the cloth. He nodded and Red advanced the throttle.

The plane rose from the field like a great black moth and droned off into the night, climbing steadily.

Below, under the trees, Major Minton stood listening to the sound of the motor as it grew fainter and fainter until it was little more than a distant hum.

"And this is war," he murmured, opening and closing his hands in a nervous way. "I hope he makes it. By the gods, he *must* make it!"

One last look he gave in the direction of the motor's faint hum, turned resolutely and re-entered his room.

Aloft Red was fairly counting the revolutions of his motor. The slight haze and low visibility were both a blessing and a handicap. If he kept too high then all landmarks such as canals, rivers and towns would be lost to him. He would simply be out in a great starlit void, thundering through space, guided by instruments that might go wrong and by an unreasoning intuitive sense of direction.

He elected to keep at an altitude that would just

permit faint outlines of the earth below. This would give some opportunity to check against his course until he reached the lines. Then, if all was going well, he would climb.

Here and there, far below and directly ahead, little points of light stabbed the darkness. They were like fireflies seen in a distant meadow. But he knew them to be enemy batteries roaring their hate. He glanced back. Behind were more points of light—British batteries in reply. Almost directly below a string of green stars, close together, seemed to move along the face of the ground. Then over to the left a string of red stars. They were signal rockets, used by the men in the trenches. The string of red stars called for a barrage. Sure enough, guns to the rear opened up in answer to the signal. Looking down Red could see their flashing bursts. He smiled. Rather decent of them to mark the front so well.

To the south a sudden column of flame leapt up, lighting the ground around and reflecting on the fleecy clouds as the light from the opened fire box of a speeding locomotive turns the streaming smoke into a torrent of silver and gold. Some battery had made a direct hit on an ammunition dump. Or again, Red thought, it might be the work of night bombers. In any case the enemy was the loser, for the flame was well behind the German lines.

A little later he made out the silver thread of a canal running almost directly north toward the sea. If that dark splotch straddling the canal marked a town, then he was on his course. Yes, there was a light, appearing suddenly and quickly extinguished. Then some sparks shot upward. It was an engine on the narrow gauge, puffing and laboring as it shunted box cars laden with war munitions. Too bad he didn't have some "eggs" to lay there.

He checked his compass and swerved slightly southward, taking up a line of flight that, had it been extended on a map, would pass from the little village of Loo, across the lines toward Roulers, traversing the Forest of Houthulst.

For several minutes he flew steadily on this course.

. . . Now he must be nearing the forest.

He nosed the ship downward. Visibility was poor. In order to make sure he must sacrifice altitude. The crescent moon was gone now and there was only the pale light of stars to aid him. Down, down, down. He must be getting dangerously near. . .

Voila! Objects were coming through the faint haze and directly ahead lay a great blotch. That must be the forest. Down still more. Yes, directly below was an open field. Was it the right one? Well, it was a field, at any rate, and well behind

the lines. He glanced back at his passenger and saw him nod. Could they both be wrong?

As the plane swooped lower he became more certain that he had judged rightly.

What was it Minton had said about the possibility of the field being trapped? . . . It might be covered with a network of wire . . . Maybe it wasn't the right field after all . . . Certainly it was none too clear, and a bad landing. . . .

All these thoughts and conclusions came swiftly. He was low now, less than two hundred feet. Yes, it was an open field.

A moment later his wheels touched lightly, bounded a little as they struck some little hummock, then went rolling along a field that seemed made to order.

Scarcely had the plane come to a stop when the secret agent alighted in haste and started running toward the cover of the woods. Not a word of farewell; no time lost in a senseless repetition of instructions.

Red made a quick estimate of the distance between his position and the black wall of trees looming against the sky at the far edge of the open field, decided he could just make it and started rolling forward. Those trees came forward more quickly than he had supposed possible, but it was now too late for a second guess. By the very strength of

his determination he lifted the plane from the ground and zoomed. For a split second it seemed he would never make it. The plane was almost hanging on the prop. Then, as he cleared the tree tops by inches he eased her a little but continued climbing steadily.

He took plenty of altitude now. No need to keep so close a check on the ground. Anywhere back over the lines he could find safe haven.

Alone there in the black night, with half of his dangerous mission accomplished, his mind began to entertain strange thoughts. What sort of high courage possessed that man who was now back there in the dark woods alone and armed only by his wits? Capture meant death—a death stripped of the slightly comforting honor that comes to the man who gives his life on the field of battle.

Nothing but the supremest love of country could so motivate a man. Country, to him, stood higher than life itself. A job wanted doing and without weighing the chances that man had undertaken it. There is a courage that comes to men operating in mass or in groups. But alone—then one must not expect courage to come to him. He must possess it.

Suddenly it came to Red that he himself lacked at least one thing that this man had—devotion to duty that would conquer rebellion and submerge self in the interests of the mass. So far he had been

carrying on with but a half formed sense of the obligation of the individual to the cause. Indeed, half of his fighting spirit was based on a desire to avenge the death of his brother. No wonder Russell had complained. Russell was right. The cause was everything, the individual only an instrument.

Lost in thoughts, he flew as straight a course homeward as a homing pigeon. His return flight had been as nicely calculated as had his objective. He signaled with his Very light pistol and they flooded the field with light. He made a perfect landing, turned the plane over to the waiting mechanics and reported to Major Minton.

Minton greeted him with genuine fervor and unconcealed delight.

When Red had finished his brief report he added: "After I bring him back I want to go back into Russell's flight."

"Fed up on this sort of thing?" Minton asked.

"No, sir. It isn't that. But I've had my eyes opened. I've had the wrong slant. For instance, take that chap I just carried over. No swank, no desire for personal glory. No grudge, no thought of self and no desire for medals to prove his bravery. He even hides his identity under the name of Black. No one to mourn, perhaps, if he should fail to come back."

"Yes, I should mourn," Minton said quietly.

"Oh, yes. But only because we failed in our small part in it."

"More reason than that, Lieutenant. You must not fail in your 'small part,' as you put it. Black has a name quite as good as my own."

"You know him, then?"

"Rather. He is my brother."

Red gasped and reached for a chair.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he asked.

"Because I did not wish to burden you with an added personal element. I knew you would do your best. After all, he is but another man carrying on."

Red looked at him in silence for a long minute. These English! Only another man carrying on! Nation, honor, duty—these above the blood ties of brotherhood. Yet he had placed Dan above all else.

"Perhaps I shouldn't have told you now," he heard Minton saying, "but your safe return has given me added confidence. Bring him back, and we will see about returning you to Russell's flight. I daresay you'll have a flight of your own soon enough."

"I don't want anything—for myself," Red answered rather doggedly. "I just want to do for you what I can't do for myself—bring back a brother."

CHAPTER XV

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY

On the third night, according to schedule, Red timed his departure so that he should be over the field back of the German lines at midnight. Visibility was now heightened by a waxing moon. The sky was unmarred by clouds, the inverted bowl of heaven infinitely deepened by myriad stars that, changeless through time, had looked down upon the world through wars and through peace, challenging man to consider the infinitesimal importance of his estate. The Milky Way was so clearly defined that Red felt as he climbed that he would like to continue ever upward until he could run his wheels along that royal highway of the gods. The stars were magnetic. They seemed to draw the plane upward. They took voice. Forget the physical laws of a mad world that has forgotten all other laws (they spoke), and come up, up, up!

At six thousand feet Red shook himself from the spell, and headed toward his objective. He was still held to earth by the ties of a duty yet unfulfilled.

As he sailed high over the front star shells and flares here and there told him that he was crossing No Man's Land. Far, far below were men who, blinded by night and by hate and misunderstanding, were sending up feeble man-made stars to illumine a barren waste of land made worthless by harassing shells. They contended bitterly for that little strip of land and were willing to buy it with blood. And here, up here above it all, was limitless space and peace, extending to the stars and beyond, without end, without limits, without Time.

That tortured strip of land was soon left behind. Yonder was the faint white ribbon of the Yser canal. He checked his compass and saw that he was on his course.

A few minutes later his sensitive nostrils caught an odor that warned him that the motor was beginning to heat badly. The smell of overheated oil became almost nauseating. The oil pressure fell off quickly.

There was but one chance left. He must turn about, reduce his speed and pray that the motor would keep functioning until he could get back over the lines. Thank God for the altitude!

He smiled a little grimly. Forget the physical laws of earth, eh, and come up? They were hard laws, and inflexible. After all, the magnetism of the earth was greater than that of the stars. Only

souls could companion with stars, and his would be among them if he failed to get back across the lines. If forced down behind the German lines, he must set fire to the plane. That can of petrol was a wise precaution. Even so, the entire structure of the plane would not be destroyed. The first question his captors would ask would be, "What are you doing back here *alone* in a two-seater?"

Before he could continue this line of thought one of the valves stuck and a cylinder cut out. A few minutes later and another went out. Altitude was everything now. That superheated motor would not function much longer. If it did not burst into flames he would be lucky. Then came a pounding and grinding in the motor and it conked.

The lines were far ahead. He could not hope to make them. Failure! His chances of making a safe landing were one in a hundred—perhaps much less, and chance of escape was nil.

Down he went, but at a slant that would give him every possible inch forward. Gravity now furnished the momentum. If he judged it nicely he could keep from slipping off on the wing. Thank Heaven for physical laws!

Impressions and conclusions based on swift observation come quickly at such a time. Far ahead he could see the occasional flash of a battery. They must be British guns. Below, and a little behind,

he saw other flashes. German guns in reply. He was at least forward of the enemy heavy artillery positions. Yes, far ahead a star shell arched upward. That would be No Man's Land. He could never make it.

Since he could not cover the distance, it would be wiser to turn back. The hazard of landing increased as he drew nearer the lines. Up there the ground was furrowed, plowed and pitted by shell fire. He must nose down now and take what Fate had to offer.

In the last few hundred feet he caught sight of a long narrow ribbon of white at right angles to his line of descent. A road! He banked sharply, giving no thought to wind direction.

The Fates had given him a road, but they had also spotted it with black objects that crawled along like giant beetles. They were trucks, coming up with supplies. In the other direction some troops were halted at rest alongside the road, but these Red did not see.

He pancaked purposely but a little rougher than he had planned. Somehow he managed to keep her from going over. The moment the plane came to a stop he seized the can of petrol and began pouring it over the wings and the cockpit. Leaping from the plane he tossed a lighted match back in the seat. Flames shot up. For a moment, dazed by the sud-

den light, he stood there watching. All around him the world was shut out by a black wall of night that fought with the circle of leaping light.

Guttural shouts sounded down the road.

Red turned to run into the protecting cover of that ring of darkness, but he took only a step, then stopped short and blinked foolishly. He was completely surrounded by German soldiers who were pressing forward with menacing rifles and drawn pistols.

The jig was up!

A German officer, with drawn Luger, seized him roughly from behind and whirled him around. Then the circle narrowed until he was in the midst of a pushing mob.

The officer spoke sharply and the men fell back a little. Others began futile efforts to extinguish the flaming plane.

The officer directed a swift flow of words at his captive. Red shook his head and smiled. A smile was one thing that any man could understand. At least he could make that Hun realize that he was unafraid.

It angered the fiercely moustached officer. He menaced Red with the Luger and again broke into a stream of words that meant nothing in the world to Red.

An older man came pushing through the crowd of

curious infantrymen, spoke sharply to the officer with the drawn pistol and then turned to Red.

"You are English?" he said, with only a slight Germanic accent.

"Yes."

"Yes? You swine! Don't you know enough to say 'Sir,' to a superior officer?"

Red looked him squarely in the eyes and said: "I do not recognize you as a superior."

The officer's face hardened with lines and he plucked his upturned moustache in an effort to make himself feel and look more savage.

It amused Red and he laughed outright.

"You will laugh differently in a little while," the German blustered. "Where is your observer? I see you are the pilot." He indicated the silver wings on Red's blouse.

"Yes. My observer escaped."

"You lie! We saw everything. No other man came from that plane. You were going after him, weren't you?"

"I don't understand. He escaped, I tell you."

"And you tell me a lie. But they will get the truth out of you up at headquarters—if they have to *cut* it out." He turned and addressed two riflemen, who stepped forward and took places on each side of Red.

"There is a line of trucks forward," he said to

Red. "I will take one of them and go forward with you to Headquarters. It will go better with you if you tell me the whole truth now."

Red scarcely heard the latter sentence. His mind was fixed upon one thing. They were going forward — nearer the trenches — and he still lived.

The German officer was not yet ready to give up in his efforts to secure information. He licked his chops over the thought that his own importance would be greatly enhanced if he could go swanking into headquarters with a complete story concerning his prisoner. But when Red failed to answer his questions, he reached over and struck him across the mouth with an open hand.

"Answer me! You swine!"

Red's first instinct was to reply with a blow but he suddenly remembered that the life of Minton's brother now hung on his ability to keep his wits.

"I tell you my observer jumped and ran into the field," Red answered. "He ran before I set fire to the plane. You simply failed to see him."

At a command from the infuriated officer the two riflemen seized Red by the arms and started down the road. The officer swanked along at their side, his chest swelling with importance.

One of the halted trucks was quickly commandeered and Red was placed on the seat by the driver. One of the soldiers took up a position on

the step opposite the driver, the officer at the extreme right end of the commodious seat, and the other soldier climbed into the back of the truck. At a word from the officer the truck swung out from the line and went lumbering forward. It displayed no lights, but the driver knew his road.

Forward, and to the rear, guns were muttering incessantly. Over in one dark wood Red noticed flashes of light that betrayed the presence of a German battery of heavy field pieces, noting too that their roar was not great enough to mark them as being of heaviest calibre. If they were ranging on the front, then the lines must be at no great distance. The headquarters of which the officer spoke must therefore be an infantry headquarters near at hand.

Red's thoughts were all on ways of escape. He must escape! By this time Minton's brother would know that something had happened, but, in keeping with their agreement, he would come to that field again on the next night, and if. . . .

The truck lumbered up the approach to a stone bridge that arched a river or a canal. As it drew near the middle of the bridge Red noticed another truck approaching from the other end. The bridge was none too wide and the driver of Red's truck pulled over close to the low stone parapet and came to a halt in order to give right of way to the other driver.

Red looked over the railing. Thirty feet below he caught the glimmer of water faintly reflecting the light of stars and the sinking moon.

How deep was that water? Three feet, surely, and three feet was all he needed.

With Red to think was to act. His left hand swung around in a sudden swift arc and his clenched fist caught the German officer full on the point of the chin. It was far from a knockout blow, but it was hard enough to daze and it carried the shock of surprise.

In a single leap Red stood on the stone parapet. For a moment he poised there, then dived just as a pistol roared behind him.

It takes less than two seconds for an object to fall thirty feet, but it is amazing the thoughts that can speed through the mind in that length of time. Red knew that he must turn his arms and head upward the moment he struck the water. He would treat it exactly as he used to treat that three-foot tank back there in the old days when open-mouthed yokels stood around and marveled at his ability to dive from a sixty-foot tower into a shallow tank. Three feet was all he needed now, all that he prayed for.

The element of surprise in his quick break for freedom was the very thing that made it possible. But hardly had he struck the water before the dazed and furious officer was standing on the parapet blaz-

ing away with his pistol. If he actually caught sight of Red, then his aim was very poor for his bullets splashed harmlessly in the water below.

The moment Red came to the surface he again dived, this time for depth. Failing to find bottom within the first five or six feet, he sensed the direction of the current and went with it, staying down as long as possible and swimming strongly. When he came up it was to expose only his nose and mouth. He heard the more businesslike reports of rifles. Bullets splashed in the water over toward the bank. The fools! They were shooting at shadows.

Diving and swimming, he went with the current until he was almost exhausted. At last he approached cautiously the west bank where a group of trees cast deep and friendly shadows. With hands and feet touching bottom, he crouched there listening. Big guns were still belching forth their hate and from far back up the river came the sound of trucks rumbling along the stone road.

Of course there would be pursuit. The thing to do was to get away from the river as quickly as possible.

He crawled out on the bank, listened again for a moment and then struck off at a trot through open fields. Reaching another little woods he lay down to catch his breath.

He knew that pursuit, planned hurriedly, is rarely

intelligent. Doubtless all front line sentries would be warned, but this would take time. Many of the elements of trench warfare were in his favor. He must keep out of all communicating trenches, once he reached them, and approach the defensive trenches with the utmost caution.

Infantrymen, to escape death, keep to the trenches. But if he was to escape, he must keep in the open. There he would come across no enemy. As for the shells, he must take his chances.

It was now well past midnight. Within the next three or four hours, before dawn began to streak the east, he must slip across the German defense trenches, cross No Man's Land before the morning strafe began and then face the hazard of getting into his own trench. This last, if he ever reached it, would be quite as dangerous as anything that lay in the immediate future. British sentries in the first line trench were particularly nervous and quick on the trigger during the early hour of dawning.

Regaining breath and strength, he pressed forward with what stealth could be employed with the urge for haste. That next hour saw the sinking of the moon, and with its passing the dark night became hideous with sound and imagined sound. Shells fell here and there, almost deafening in their concussions, but he kept to his feet and pushed on.

At last he came to a communicating trench tracing

its zig-zag way forward. He backed up and veered to the right, watching closely for laterals and stopping now and then to listen.

Voices, low, subdued and guttural, told him that a lateral trench lay directly ahead. It was a secondary defense and would contain far more men than the front line, which would be held lightly.

He crawled back and paralleled the trench for fifty yards, then again carefully moved forward. No sound in the trench. A shell came whining over and struck just at the edge of the trench, spouting a geyser of earth and sudden flame. Before the dirt had ceased falling Red had leaped the trench and flung himself into an old shell hole.

Someone was moaning in the trench just behind. Voices again and a call which Red guessed came from some excited or wounded man calling for first aid.

Before him now was a network of barbed wire. He must avoid touching it, for he had heard that the enemy wire defenses were sometimes charged with an electrical current.

A path through the wire at last and then again cautiously forward. The ground here had been churned by shell fire. Level ground simply did not exist. Again and again he tripped and fell, sprawling headlong into empty shell craters. In one he caught the strong odor of gas and his heart

did a flip-flop. Gas was a hazard with which he had not reckoned. He carried no mask. A few gas shells in his vicinity and. . . .

Voices again, directly ahead. Then a hissing and sputtering as a rocket flare swept upward, trailed by a stream of sparks. *Poof!* High above, the flare burst into a ball of blinding white light.

Red dived into a shell hole, lighted now by that dazzling floating white ball. Someone in the trench directly ahead had become suspicious of some unusual sound and had sent up the illuminating rocket. So long as it floated magically aloft every object on the ground stood out in sharp relief. It faded as suddenly as it had come and darkness rushed in. But only for a minute. Some two hundred yards ahead another rocket streamed upward. From the direction of its arc Red knew that it came from the British trenches. Some Tommy, made nervous by the German flare, wanted another "look see."

Red felt a warm glow steal over his body and his heart began pounding wildly. Two hundred yards between him and safety. But those two hundred yards carried a thousand chances for failure. Barbed wire everywhere. At any minute the ground might be raked with shell fire. German patrols were out in No Man's Land nearly every night, lurking in shell holes and moving about in the darkness like formless grey ghosts. If one of these patrols should

be encountered, there would be the swift, sudden thrust of a bayonet and all would be over.

A German machine gun came to life and raked a small section of No Man's Land. This was another hazard.

For a moment Red felt panic stricken. Safety within two hundred yards, and those two hundred yards filled with death—and with the dead.

It took strength of will to command courage. This was no time for entertaining thoughts of defeat.

Again subdued voices from the trench directly ahead. Red crawled to the right, slowly, cautiously, and again stopped to listen.

Silence. A shell came screaming over. If it would only hit the trench as had that other one he could leap across in the ensuing confusion and noise. But it passed on and fell near the secondary line. Another stroke of luck like that first one might not come again in a thousand years. This trench must be crossed with cunning, not by luck.

He crawled forward until he could peep over into the fire bay. That particular bay was some ten feet long. Traverses cut off the bays to the right and left. A voice came from the bay to the right.

No question about it now—this was the front line and it was lightly held.

Making sure that there was no sentry in the bay

directly below, Red made a flying leap, landed lightly on the sand bags at the front of the trench, took a few running steps and flopped into a fox hole.

From the trench behind came the droning sound of two men in conversation. Then one of them chuckled, deep-throated.

Ha! The fools! Fine sentries they were!

Inch by inch Red forced his way along the wire until he came to a gap freshly made by a shell within the hour. Through this he crawled, then around a long barrier of iron horses covered with wire, and out into the open.

Something moved over to the left. Red flattened himself against the ground. Another rocket soared skyward from the German trench. No Man's Land became as light as day. Blasted tree trunks took on strange, misshapen human form with gaunt arms outstretched in mute protest against further butchery.

The light faded. Again Red moved forward.

That next two hundred yards will always remain in his mind as the most hideous of nightmares. Twice he was driven into shell holes by the sudden glare of a rocket and in one he was forced to lie alongside the torso of a headless, legless German and he shared another shell hole with two dead British soldiers.

Up against the wire at last. Now what to do? The least sound would be sure to draw fire. He knew that every gap in the wire was covered by a machine gun and by sentries. If he crawled along he might find a gap made by shell fire, but the slightest sound would bring over a hand grenade. In crossing the German lines every risk was gladly taken. It was a simple price for liberty. Then too, one expects nothing at the hands of the enemy. But now, almost within grasp of safety, it was fearsome to consider death at the hands of a comrade.

For several minutes he lay quite still, scarcely breathing in his effort to hear familiar voices. He was wet, cold and caked with mud and slime. White wraiths of ground mist were beginning to rise from the sodden wastes of No Man's Land. In another hour light would begin to streak the east and then would come the hour of "stand to" when every soldier would be at his post, peering over the top and ready to repel any attack.

Moments were priceless. Once the lines were gained it would take a long while to get back to the squadron, and even now Major Minton must be in despair.

Some ruse must be employed. To go forward quickly and spring into the trench was to court death at the hands of a comrade before he could establish identity.

It was not easy to think, lying there against the wet earth, cold, muddy, miserable, with clothing torn and hands bleeding from scratches. But at last he thought of a plan. With great care he made his way along the wire until he reached a shell hole. Crawling into this he at once let out a groan as terrible and as piteous as ever came from the lips of a dying man. He waited a moment, then repeated that heart-touching moan, increasing the volume a little. Someone moved in the trench. Again Red let out a groan.

"Lorlumme, Bill! Listen to that bloody beggar, will ye? Dyin' 'ard, 'e is, right under our noses."

Those were the sweetest words Red had heard since he entered the war. Bill, eh? Fine! Again Red moaned. Silence for a moment. Then, softly, "Bill," he called.

"Gord 'elp me! 'E's callin' you," came from the trench. "Or else I'm daft as a cuckoo. Did ye 'ear the bloomin' beggar, Bill?"

"I did, so 'elp me Gord. . . Who's there?" came a cautious call.

Red simulated a groan half broken off and called back, "Come help me, Bill. I'm wounded."

There was a scrambling sound in the trench and then another voice that warned:

"Stay where you are, you fool! Like as not it's a blarsted 'Un with a trick."

"No, no!" Red spoke in a loud whisper. "I'm Lieutenant McGee."

"McGee, is it? Bill, do you know any Leftinent McGee?"

"I do not. It's a trick, I tell you."

Red let out another heart-touching groan. It served to convince the man called "Bill." A moment later he came crawling to the edge of the shell hole, poking his rifle before him.

"Here Leftinent?"

"Yes."

Bill was not a very strong man, but the excitement of the moment gave him strength. With much grunting he got Red on his shoulder, stumbled over to a neighboring gap in the wire and brought his burden to the edge of the trench.

Red could not help but enjoy the joke, but he must carry out the act. If he became suddenly active, before they had a chance to identify him, his life would not be worth a farthing.

"'Ere 'Enery," Bill whispered down into the dark trench. "'Elp me with 'im."

Gently they lowered him into the trench.

Trench warfare was a rotten thing, but to Red the bottom of that trench was like Paradise. Before he had a chance to decide on his next move the two soldiers picked him up, head and feet, and carried him along the trench to a shallow dugout.

There, by feeble candle light, Red saw a Second Lieutenant seated on a chair made from packing boxes.

He decided it was time to come to life. He arose altogether too swiftly for a man so grievously wounded. Instantly Bill was upon him, pinioning his arms to his side.

Red laughed. "All right, Bill. Hold me tight as you please, but get me back to headquarters as quick as you can."

"Lorlumme, Leftinent!" Bill turned to his officer. "A minute ago this beggar was limp as a rag and groanin' like a stuck pig."

The infantry officer had arisen from his crude chair and stood looking at Red with squinting eyes. Spotting the soiled silver wings on Red's blouse he exclaimed:

"A pilot! At the front—on foot. Either you are a spy or we are seeing things."

"Neither," Red said and flashed his most winning smile. "Take me back to your headquarters. I'll quick enough establish my identity."

"I'll take you back, right enough. You can lay to that. Come with me."

"And if 'e's a bloody spy, Leftinent, send for me to 'elp shoot 'im," Bill said. "I 'arf broke me bloomin' back draggin' 'im in."

* * * * *

Red got back to the squadron in a staff car just as C Flight, under Russell, went roaring across the airdrome to take the air on offensive patrol. He watched them clear the trees, swing around in perfect formation as though they were fixed upon a common axis, and start climbing. Their wings were gold shot by the morning sun. Gilded dragon flies going out to war. It made not the slightest difference that one of their comrades had gone forth the night before to meet death. The gap would be filled by another, and ever and ever again, when red mornings came, so long as life and will remained, they would carry on.

Major Minton came walking across the 'drome toward his hut. He walked a little more quickly than usual, held himself a little more erect, his chin forward in a more determined angle. To Red it was a picture of self-made courage meeting the devastating tornado of emotions within him.

Red jumped from the car and started running to meet him.

"Major! Major Minton!"

Minton stopped short. Toward him came a mud-caked, disheveled figure, flying helmet gone, topped by a flaming bush of tousled red hair.

"McGee! You! Thank God! What—where—"

The story poured from Red's lips in a stream of short sentences robbed of all color and all unim-

portant incident. It was terse and laconic, but one with the slightest imagination could fill in the gaps. Its brevity made it the more dramatic.

"I'm sorry, sir. Terribly sorry," Red began stumbling now in his speech. "But he will be there again to-night—sure! I'll get him to-night, Major. Sure!"

Minton put his hand on Red's shoulder and gave it a squeeze.

"Possibly," he said. "But the chances are less."

"I did—my best, sir. I'll get him to-night."

Minton shook his head. "Some one else must try, McGee. One experience like that is enough to shoot any man's nerve. You've used up all your luck."

Red took hold of both the Major's arms, forgetting rank, forgetting everything except the main issue.

"No, sir. Not that. I have been there before, remember. No one else can know as much about it. I've used up all my *bad* luck. Please, Major. I didn't go through all—all that, last night, just to get back here to send another. You gave the job to me."

Minton looked at him evenly for a long minute.

"It is still your job," he said at last. "Go get cleaned up and get some sleep—if you can. I will see that another plane is made ready."

Red stepped back and saluted smartly, but smiling now for the first time.

"Anything else, sir?"

"One thing, that may interest you. Your old Nieuport is back in commission. In the future it will carry a flight commander."

"You mean—me, sir? In command of a flight?"

"Why not? You have at least one great requisite—the ability to come back. I think you were born to be hanged."

CHAPTER XVI

FOR VALOR

Skill and luck are the handmaidens of a war pilot. Let one desert, or one of them never be gained, and the end is not far off. So long as both remain the impossible becomes possible, the difficult becomes easy and tremendous obstacles are taken with unbroken stride.

Red was right in his prophecy that he had used up all of his bad luck. That night his second effort was wholly without disturbing incident save that at one time he got a little off his course, checked the error in time and flew as straight to that field as though he had been there a dozen times.

As he nosed down toward the field he saw, far below, the tiny flash of a light. Dash, dot, dash. Thirty seconds passed. Again the dash, dot, dash.

Aided materially by the light of a gibbous moon, the landing was made with ease. It did seem an interminable time before a black-robed figure came running across the field, but in a moment his passenger was crawling into the cockpit, the idling prop

whirled into new life and this time the plane cleared the trees at the edge of the field by a margin of a hundred feet.

Red poked his nose toward the moon and climbed steadily. The motor was singing a song of reassurance. Even so, the ceiling would be none too high. Altitude and a true course westward. Once behind British lines he could come down and find his way or, failing, drop a flare and land on territory that was at least friendly.

But skill and luck were now serving with a will. Twice he circled his own 'drome to make sure of his landing, swept low over one of the hangars, wheeled, landed as lightly as a piece of thistledown and taxied up to the hangar where Major Minton stood waiting.

The Secret Mission was complete.

After the two brothers had grasped hands in understanding silence, the spy turned to Red, who was just crawling from the cockpit, and asked:

"What happened last night to prevent your coming?"

"It is a rather long story," Major Minton broke in, "and McGee is a rotten story-teller. Come over to the hut and I'll tell you about it. But I'll tell you one thing now. If he isn't decorated for last night's action, then there is no justice."

"Really? Well, whatever the story, certainly

luck was with him. If he had come to that field last night it would have been in vain. A German regiment was bivouaced in the woods and a mouse couldn't have escaped their notice."

Red exhaled sharply and putting out a hand steadied himself against one of the wing struts. Talk about luck!

"Major," he said after a brief pause, "I've got the best passenger in the world riding with me."

The major, misunderstanding the statement, looked at his brother and smilingly said, "Oh Charles is a bit of all right."

Red snorted. "Aw, I'm not talking about *him*. Old Lady Luck herself is riding with me."

* * * * *

A few days later Major Minton made good his promise concerning putting McGee in command of a flight. Furthermore, he went so far as to allow Red some expression in the matter of the personnel of that flight. The result would have given any cautious squadron commander an acute heart attack. That flight was made up entirely of young bird-men who, if conclusions could be drawn from their actions, entertained no thought or hope of extending their lives beyond the finish of the present hostilities.

Buzz Larkin had returned to the squadron. Red had chosen him without hesitation and Buzz had

accepted the compliment with a shout. And there was Fitzgerald-Browne, almost as small as Red, quite as young and with a record, to hear him tell it, "of five German planes and ten English. All complete washouts." He had once been with a squadron of Spads, and when in the air was as good as any pilot, but he seemed never to get the feel of the little Spads with their small wing spread. He tried to set them down like old Avros, and a Spad resents such treatment. It takes off quickly and must be landed with plenty of flying speed. It was made for the air. On the ground it was as treacherous as an army mule. Fitzgerald-Browne's commander, finally despairing, had arranged for a transfer which, Browne said, greatly increased his chances for a long life.

There was young Hemingway, appropriately nicknamed Hem. He had a pronounced hesitance in his speech and an habitual if not chronic frog in his throat. Whenever he started to speak he cleared his throat several times with halting, embarrassed "Hems," and then gave it up as a bad job. But in the air, where words were not needed, Hem suffered no hesitation. He went direct to the point, holding his nose on his adversary until a collision seemed inevitable. He expressed himself in the air—fully, definitely and with great discomfort to the enemy.

Last, and most quixotic of all was Speed Steele. Speed was at once the laziest and slowest man that ever wore a pair of wings. He considered a walk across the airdrome an onerous task, to be undertaken only under protest and to be done after the fashion of one who is undecided whether to continue or turn back. His quarters were the most comfortable in the squadron; the cockpit of his plane rigged up with geegaws designed to add to his comfort. He fairly gnashed his teeth over the thought of dawn patrols. He contended that dawn was made for roosters and milkmen and that he was neither. When Speed Steele went on dawn patrol he went in anger and someone had to pay the price. He argued that the sooner all Huns were shot down the sooner dawn patrols would cease. In support of this argument he fairly flung himself at his enemies. While physically lazy, Speed was mentally alert and active, though his eyes had the quality of the eyes of a dreamer. He seemed to be always looking afar off. Perhaps he saw what all war pilots saw—the inevitable end that must come some day. Seeing this, Speed was mildly interested but quite too tired to get excited about it.

Had the German airmen been advised that these five men (or boys, for the total of their ages would not greatly exceed that of a centenarian) had

been banded together in one combat flight, or had they known the outward and visible characteristics of the individuals in the group, then certainly they would have oiled their guns for the slaughter and called Major Minton a madman careless of his pilots.

They would not have been alone in this latter charge. In the squadron were many men willing to testify that Minton had become as crazy as a loon. When Battleship Russell first heard of it he roared like a bull and declared that it was high time for some one to advise the Major that discipline would win the war.

But Minton had seen three years of discipline and theory put into practice and the war still dragged on. If five men could be found with skill sufficient to justify their laudable ambition to jump the Hun whenever and wherever they found him, such a group might go a very long way toward creating a very wholesome and hearty respect for British airmen in that particular sector.

The Major was right. At the end of the first week Red's flight had fattened the squadron's record without any cost to themselves except that their planes were forever in need of patching. Wings, struts and fuselages came in for a great deal of strafing, but they always brought their pilots home.

At the end of the first week Battleship Russell

reluctantly admitted that a high combative spirit had its advantages, but he also complained that it was becoming increasingly hard to find a Hun this side of Berlin. He was having to go a long way after meat.

Twice during that first week Red found himself engaged in combat with the German pilot flying the Albatross bearing the gold and black dragon, but each time the old enemy escaped. That pilot was consummately skilled and he was also cautious. When the tide of battle went against him, he sought escape. This fretted Red and it also worried him. He began to wonder if that man was to prove his Nemesis. Four times they had met and as yet the Hun had the best of it. Although aided by another, this same fellow had once brought him down. This Red could not forget. He must get that plane the next time. Failing, there might be no next time.

Time passes quickly for war pilots. It is all a mad dream, beyond belief, unreal, numbing the senses. Morning after morning and evening after evening they go out to meet the enemy, zooming, diving, slipping off the wing or spinning downward in escape. Now and then a plane goes plunging earthward trailed by fire and black smoke. There is the spent, helpless feeling that comes when you realize that never again will you see the face of the chap who but a few hours ago was engaging you in quip

and merry jest. Death and suffering were not witnessed, but that made it all the more grotesque and unreal. One hour a man was alive and full of hope. Then luck or skill deserted him and he—he simply wasn't! Out there over the lines dwelt an invisible, diabolical magician who took laughing, youth-filled boys and changed them into—a memory!

But the game went on. It was fatal to brood over a memory. Fortunately, air fighting possesses a lethal quality that deadens the sensibilities and, in time, makes death itself preferable to the living torture of speculation and doubt.

In time Red began to pinch himself to see if he was really alive. As he came back to the 'drome with his flight he would count noses two or three times, unable to believe his eyes and wondering if he would not awake from a long, horrible dream to discover that he had lost every member of his flight and that only ghosts were flying with him.

Sometimes men went mad. . . . He must look out for that. . . . It wouldn't do to think too much. . . .

Lady Luck was still riding with him, but perhaps Russell was right, after all. A little more caution might save a life. There was Larkin, Fitzgerald-Browne, Hemingway and Speed Steele, all still among the living yet all following him along dangerous sky trails, the end of which no man

could see. He was their leader. Where he went they followed. If he made a mistake, they made no sign, following with a courage that turned mistake and possible defeat into victory. But their lives were in his hand. Some day he would lead them into. . . .

Faugh! No wonder men went mad!

Just when Red was beginning seriously to consider the state of his nerves, the entire squadron was moved back for a few days of much needed rest. Reason enough for loud thanksgiving!

Back there in the rest sector came a day that to Red was more unreal than any of his front line experiences. A General Officer—a Brass Hat who took himself so seriously that his government had in turn been so persuaded—came down to the little village where the squadron was billeted. His mission on that day was to invest men with certain dangling, glittering decorations designed to set a stamp of a Nation's approval upon their wearers and single them out as men who having dared to perform a duty still lived to further offer themselves to the gluttonous maw of war.

Soldiers were drawn up in a hollow square; bands played martial music; flags dipped and fluttered in the breeze; men stood with eyes riveted to the front, waiting for the Brass Hat to halt before them, recite sonorous words that seemed empty

when they spoke of bravery, and then pin upon their blouses bits of ribbon-dangled metal fashioned by men in peace for the glorification of men at arms.

Red stood at the extreme right of this favored line. His was the place of honor, for he was to be twice decorated. He held his eyes straight forward, unseeing. The flags, the color, all these were gone. In a dream he heard the Brass Hat speaking to him, yet they were strange words, coming from afar off.

"For valor and bravery of a type. . . without thought of self . . . yours an example to comrades . . . by a grateful Nation honored. . . ."

What empty words! An example to comrades! Now his eyes became seeing. A plane, wounded to death, plunged earthward, trailed by flame and smoke. In it rode a wide-eyed boy, painting his death across the sky in a column of fire. No medals on his breast. How could one be an example to such comrades? A German plane jumped down on a kite balloon. Poof! A trailing white rag swelled into a parachute. The plane came on, spitting lead. A body sagged limply in the parachute harness. Danny! What medals did he wear? Who could speak to him of valor?

The Brass Hat came to the end of his pretty little speech, stepped forward and pinned two medals on Red's breast, then stepped back, saluted smartly and faced the next man.

. . . How the time dragged. . . . Would the funny little fuss-budget never tire of spouting words? . . .

The band was playing again. Ranks broke. Men came rushing forward and Red felt others wringing his hand. Among them was Major Minton, chuckling like a boy who has passed his grades.

Red smiled, but the smile was a little hard and the eyes did not join in with it. . . . How bravely the living remembered themselves and forgot the dead!

* * * *

That evening when Red and Buzz entered one of the cafes they found it packed with officers and soldiers making the most of a golden opportunity. Every table was taken. Waitresses, far too few in number to minister to the clamorous wants of so large a group, were fluttering from table to table as they made valiant efforts to understand orders given in poor French made the more unintelligible by a liberal sprinkling of English.

Over in one corner a group of soldiers were singing and drumming a clattering accompaniment on the table top with knife and fork. In another corner a Tommy was lifting his voice in the dolorous chant:

“I want to go home,
I wanna go home,

Take me far back over the sea
Where the Boche he can't get at me . . .
Oh, my! I'm too young to die,
I wanna go home."

It was a colorful, happy, motley crew. Here and there were a few Australians, their picturesque hats pinned up on one side by metal rosettes. There were Scotch Highlanders in plaid kilties and with funny little caps set at rakish angles atop sandy heads. There were several Canadians, quiet in uniform and in manner; and here and there a few Frenchmen in blue blouses gloriously bemedaled. The latter looked on quietly, and withal a little amused.

Red and Buzz stood near the entrance, looking around for a chance to get a table.

"There's Major Minton," Buzz pointed, "motioning us to come over. Lucky dog! He has a table all to himself."

\ They forced their way through the jam to Minton's table.

Minton welcomed them. "I've an appointment here with a Colonel in the American army," he said, "but I am sure he will be glad to see you. Won't you sit here?"

"An American Colonel!" Red echoed. "What is he doing here?"

"He has been sent over to get some first hand

information on how the war in the air is being fought. There is quite a group of Americans over at Dieppe and Eu, I understand. They are sent over in advance details—military observers, I think they are called. A few units are in the lines, farther down.”

“Really?”

“So I understand. Of course it is hard to separate fact from rumor.”

“Is this American a flyer?” Buzz asked.

“Oh, yes. But I understand they haven’t a great many planes over there and not any too many instructors. He is here to get some ideas about how we do things.” Minton looked around the room and smiled. “Rather strange place to get any flying information,” he said. “But he is going up to one of the squadrons to-morrow.”

“I’ll be glad to see him,” Red said. “I’ll admit I am a little homesick.”

“Naturally. Would you like to be with the Americans now that they are in it?”

“That is a hard question, Major.”

“Tut! Tut! You need not fear offending me.”

“I have been treated splendidly in the R. F. C., but—well, I’m an American, you know.”

“I understand. What about you, Larkin?”

“I’m an American too, but I’ll admit frankly that I’m particular about what I fly. Nieuports are

good enough for me. Look over there. See that chap singing? He's on an R. E. 8. He'd better sing while he can. I'd just as soon have a coffee mill."

"Rubbish!" Minton scoffed. "They are good ships. However, pride is a very good thing. Every pilot thinks his plane the best. I dare say that chap feels sorry for you."

"What are the Americans flying?" Buzz asked.

"A type of Curtis and J. N. E. 3's. Jennies, they call them."

Buzz shook his head. "Never saw one, but the name sounds *loose*. I'm satisfied where I am."

Minton smiled. "Then you are not like that fellow over in the corner who has been singing 'I want to go home?'"

"He doesn't want to go home, Major. Not really. If he were suddenly ordered home he would howl like a wolf. That's what he wants to do—howl. Whatever it is that he *has* to do, that is what he will howl about. I'm with him. It is a soldier's right, you know."

Minton studied Buzz. "I haven't heard you howling," he said. "Have you, McGee?"

"Sure. We all howl. We are just careful to do it where you won't hear."

"I see. But after your experience this morning I should think you—"

He broke off short, his eyes blinking stupidly as he looked at a spot on Red's chest just over the heart.

No decorations were there.

"Where are they?" Minton demanded.

Red's face colored. "In my pocket," he answered. "I can't wear those things, you know."

"Why not, pray?"

Red winked at him rather broadly in an effort to close the subject, but the Major was not to be denied.

"Why not?" he repeated.

Red gulped, looked at Buzz appealingly, tried to speak and again ended with a loud gulp.

Buzz came to the rescue.

"We've had quite a quarrel about it, Major," he explained. "McGee says that one of them was given him for saving my life and that he'll rot before he wears it. Says that he wasn't trying to save my life at all but was looking for meat. In fact, he rather led me to believe that my life wasn't worth saving. Sometimes I think he has lost some of his marbles."

"You don't understand," Red said. "Don't you see, Major, he's my buddy? Every time I put that thing on I'd be reminding him what a whale of a guy I am. Pure swank, don't you see?"

Minton's eyes became infinitely kindly. "I see,"

he said slowly. "But the other one was given for quite a different thing."

"Yes, and given to the wrong fellow. What about your bro—er—that is, what about the chap who went along? He is the man who deserves it."

"Nonsense! What's the good of having—Hullo! Here is Colonel Halleck."

The three men jumped to their feet. Minton made the introductions and the colonel at once put both the junior officers at ease by a display of interest that was genuine and friendly.

The colonel was eager to get information about actual fighting conditions at the front; Red and Buzz were equally eager to hear about conditions at home. The result was unsatisfactory to both.

Was it true that the Germans were beginning to use parachutes as an emergency escape for pilots? the colonel asked. Perhaps in a few cases. And was it true (this from Red) that America was experimenting with a new mystery motor? Perhaps, but it was yet a secret. How many American troops were there in France? And was it true that some American pilots were being sent over to be attached to the English? The colonel did not know, but he would like to inquire if the German planes were superior to the English. Ha! That was the bunk! Why, one Englishman was good for . . . And by the way, was America to have a sector all her

own, or would she be under French command? The colonel did not know, but he would like to inquire whether the French Spads were really superior to various types of British planes. Well, the Spad was a good ship, went up like an elevator and all that sort of thing, but England was developing some new ships that would beat them . . . and by the way, how many trained pilots did America have?

Major Minton at last came in as moderator.

"See here," he said, "Colonel Halleck is here to get information, not to be asked a lot of questions. This isn't a reunion, you know."

Red and Buzz accepted the mild reprimand as gracefully as possible and for the next hour acted as assistants to Minton in answering the stream of questions which the colonel poured out. When closing time came the colonel had not yet exhausted either himself or his store of questions.

Walking down the dark street toward their billets, Buzz said to Red:

"Why do you suppose the Major asked us how we would like to be back with the Americans?"

"Don't know."

"See anything in it?"

"Naw. Just a question."

"Humph!" Silence for a minute except that the dark walls of the old buildings along the narrow street echoed the clatter of boots on the cobblestones.

Somewhere down the street a home-going quartette was lingering lovingly over the melodious passages of "It's a Long Way to Tipperary."

"Well, would you?" Buzz asked.

"Would I what?"

"Like to be with one of our own outfits?"

"Sure—in a way. Wouldn't you?"

"I'm not so sure. After listening to that colonel ask questions I'm willing to let well enough alone. That's my motto. But I'll bet two bob to a dough-nut that we get sent back as instructors."

"Forget it. We've too much to learn yet."

"Yeah? Then what does that make the Colonel? Two bob to a dough-nut."

"I'll take it," Red said. "French dough-nut?"

"No. American. They know how to make 'em. I'll collect when we get sent back to an American outfit."

CHAPTER XVII

THE YANKS ARE COMING

The squadron was again at the front, this time near Wormhoudt. The first two mornings Red led his flight on patrol he encountered nothing more exciting than some poorly directed Archie fire. On the evening of the third day the luck was with them and they flushed three German planes out of a cloud bank, bagging two. One fell to Red's gun and Buzz got one. Speed Steele chased the other one clear beyond Langemarck and came in late to mess, complaining of his luck. In the future, he declared, all German pilots desiring to be shot down by one Speed Steele must arrange to have this done before mess time.

"Serves you right," Red told him, but at the same time giving him a wink. "You had no business running away from the flight. You have no conception of proper formation flying."

Battleship Russell stopped a liberal portion of meat half way between plate and mouth and gazed at Red, mouth agape.

"Yes, sir," Red continued, enjoying the situation. "In the future I want you to pay a little more attention to my orders. I don't want you running around loose in the sky that way. It's dangerous and it makes you late to mess. To win this war we must keep formation and check in on time for chow. It is positively essential."

Russell wolfed the portion of meat and with a most atrocious disregard for table manners shook his fork under Red's nose.

"Go ahead and do your spoofing," he growled, "but when you get back with that new bunch of American pilots being sent over I hope you will remember something about formation flying."

"What do you mean?" Red asked, looking at him in frank amazement.

"Haven't you heard?"

"Heard what?"

"That orders came down this afternoon sending you down to Paris to report for duty as an instructor with some newly arrived American unit."

Red shot a quick look at Buzz, then back at Russell.

"You're crazy," he scoffed.

"I thought you knew," Russell apologized, wondering if he had not spoken out of turn.

"Who told you?" Red demanded.

"Minton. But for Heaven's sake don't tell him

I told you. Where have you been all afternoon?"

"Out trying to keep a brood of wild partridges in formation," Red answered as he overturned a chair in his haste to arise. "What about Larkin?"

"Yes, he goes too."

"Come on, Buzz," Red called as he rushed for the door.

Russell jumped up. "Wait!" he called. "Don't tell—" He was talking to a closed door. "Oh, Lord!" he groaned, sinking back into his chair. "I should have known that wild hyena would jump the gun."

Red and Buzz slowed to a walk as they saw Minton coming from his quarters. One look at their faces told Minton the story.

"Russell couldn't keep it, eh?" he asked.

"We heard," Red evaded. "Is it true?"

"Yes, it is true. And I am mighty sorry to lose you—both. The order came just after you went out on patrol."

"When is it effective, sir?"

"At once. How do you feel about it?"

Red stood digging one toe in the ground.

"Buzz," he said, "I owe you a dough-nut."

"What's this?" Minton demanded.

"Nothing, sir. Just a little wager I lost. I'll feel all right about it, Major, if you'll grant me two small favors."

"I will do anything possible for you, McGee. What are they?"

"Let me go out on patrol just once more—to-morrow morning—and give me a few hours' leave of absence to-morrow afternoon."

"Nonsense! Pure nonsense! I can give you the leave to-morrow morning, but I can't permit the other. Why do you ask that?"

"It's this way, Major. I'm glad the order is here. I'll admit that. But why? Is it only because I am to be with my own people, or have I got the wind up a little?"

"Nonsense! Pure—"

"It isn't, sir. I'd never be worth a snap again if I couldn't prove to myself—"

"Impossible! I will grant you the leave if you promise to be back here at five o'clock."

"And you won't let me go out on patrol?"

"Indeed not. If something should happen it would all fall on me."

Red saluted and turned away to go to his billet, while Buzz, in company with Minton, returned to the mess hall.

Alone with his thoughts Red fell upon a plan which he knew was rank insubordination but he could not expel it from his mind. Minton would never understand. Perhaps no one would. But he was the one who forever after must live with his

thoughts. He was glad that the order had come down. Although he would remain in the uniform of a British officer, he would be associated with his own people. But was this the only reason for his pleasure in the matter? Was he afraid to go out again on the dawn patrol?

He snatched his cap from the bed and walked hurriedly over to the hangars.

"Williams," he said to the master mechanic in charge of his plane, "I want to have my ship out on the line in the morning at the usual hour."

"Yes, sir."

"Have you heard the news?"

"What news, sir?"

"Nothing. You haven't heard, I see. Let it go. If anyone says anything to you, keep a tight lip. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Red returned to his billet. Buzz was there, sitting in the middle of a huge pile of personal equipment. When Buzz began packing he first unpacked everything, piling all in one huge heap.

"Better get busy packing your stuff," Buzz said. "We leave here to-morrow evening. If we pack to-night we can sleep late in the morning."

"Then move that pile of junk over in the corner and give me some room. What do you think this is—general inspection?"

For an hour they worked busily, sorting, packing, and discovering a surprising amount of stuff for which they had no need but lacked the courage to discard.

"Just look at that!" Buzz pointed to a pile of souvenirs. "There's a piece of wood out of the prop of that old Avro I washed out back in school. Supposed to be a good luck piece. There's that stocking given me by that girl—What was her name? Can't remember, but it's good luck just the same. And there's that Rin Tin Tin and Ninnette given me by the little daughter of the old woman who billeted us down at St. Pol. And that little medalion that Yvonne Mansard gave me—said it had been blessed by the priest. Guess it had, too. At least it's been good luck. And all this other stuff, picked up first one place and then another. If this war lasts much longer I'll need a truck. But I can't throw any of it away for I'm not sure which one carries the luck. You can't afford to crowd your luck, can you?"

"I guess not. But I carry only two."

"That's enough—if they work. I've collected too many. But say! You were certainly trying to crowd your luck with the Major to-night. Where do you get that stuff wanting to go out on patrol to-morrow morning? I could have punched your nose. If Minton had said you could go I'd have been forced

to put on a lot of swank and go along. In this game my motto is 'let well enough alone.' Now we can sleep to-morrow morning. This war is getting better all the time. Eh, Shrimp?"

"Yeah," Red answered, but his voice had a non-committal quality. Then he added quickly, "Yeah, much better. Just think, Buzz! The Yanks are coming!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LAST PATROL

At daybreak Red awoke, dressed quietly in order not to awaken Buzz, slipped out of the room and hurried across to the hangars.

Russell was on the line, checking his ship. Other members of his flight were arriving, sleepy-eyed and grouching. Speed Steele was among them, having been assigned to take the place of a pilot who was sick.

"What are you doing here?" Russell asked Red.

"The Major gave me leave to go on a little trip. I thought I would start early."

"What a chump!" said Speed Steele. "Ye gods of war! Just give me such a chance to sleep and see what I'll do with it."

"Where are you going?" Russell asked, his voice indicating suspicion.

"Down back of Ypres."

"That's a fine place to go! There's nothing down there."

"Not of interest to you, perhaps."

Red turned away and walked over to his plane.

"All set, Williams?"

"Right, sir."

He walked around the plane, checking turnbuckles, rudder controls, and examining new patches on the wings and fuselage. At last he crawled into the small cockpit.

"Let's go," he said.

Williams began going through the ritual.

"Petrol off, sir?"

"Petrol off."

Swish! Swish! Swish! went the prop.

"Contact, sir!"

"Contact."

The gaudy emblemed Nieuport became a vibrant thing, eager to be off, its raucous voice shouting to the dawn.

Red took off and swung westward, climbing steadily, but keeping his eyes on the 'drome. At last he saw five little dragon-flies leave the ground and mount upward. He kept climbing and circling. At twelve thousand feet he turned east, gave her a full gun and streaked after Russell's flight.

He overtook them south of Hondschoote, but was sitting a little above them. All of them looked up, studying his insignia. Then Russell left his flight and climbed to meet him. When Russell made sure of the plane he came alongside, close, shaking his

head and motioning Red back. In answer Red shook his head and smiled. He knew that Russell was using a great many words that were wholly uncomplimentary, but he stuck to his purpose. In order to make that purpose clear he pointed down and dived, taking up a place at the end of one wing of the formation.

Russell thundered down behind him, still shaking his fist and motioning back. But all of his expostulations failed and at last he again took up his position at the head of the flight.

Red looked across at Speed Steele. Speed waved and made circles with his finger around his head. Wheels in the head, was Speed's verdict, but he was also pleased, as was every member in the flight. Even Russell was conscious of the compliment. Here was the rebel, flight commander in his own right, back in the formation he so despised and out to seek trouble when he could be safe at the 'drome.

The patrol swung south. Red began to wonder just what Minton would say to him. Time and again he had disobeyed Russell's orders, but it was not premeditated disobedience. This was a different matter. He had planned it. Perhaps he had even violated a confidence, but only because he could not make them understand. Last night when Minton had verified the order of transfer Red had felt a deep thanksgiving. And then had come the thought

that while he was going back to comparative safety, his old friends would be going out to combat. In time most of them would fail to come back. The pitcher carried once too often to the well. But he had been saved—and he had been glad. Not that he was afraid of death. He was only afraid of fear. Because of this he had to go just one more time. Maybe Steele was right—wheels in the head—but one can't be governed . . .

Ah! There now! Seven Hun planes were coming up from the southeast, about two thousand feet below. Red glanced up at Russell. Yes, Russell saw them, but cautious as ever was studying the sky above them.

Red started a dive, but with a will greater than he had ever felt before nosed back up into formation. For once he would follow orders. This last time he would show Russell that he could pay him the compliment of obedience.

But why didn't Russell do something? The Huns had sighted them and were climbing to the attack. Why sacrifice—

Russell waggled his planes, signalling the attack.

Down, down, down! The wires were singing their delight.

Red forgot all his fear of fear. All thought of this being his last fight with the squadron left his head. Over his nose was a Hun, foolishly zooming

straight up in the line of fire. And what luck! It was the old enemy—he of the gold and black dragon, but with the emblem painted on a new Fokker. Ah! A new ship, eh? Well . . .

Red smiled grimly as he thumbed the trigger. Straight into the zooming plane went the tracers, but it never swerved. What was that ship made of? Iron? He should have gotten that fellow weeks before. Maybe he had given him one chance too many. He'd get him now if he had to barge into him head on. No, he must get him clean. Six against seven. One must be wiped out before the tally was even. He must be careful not to let that zooming Fokker come up under his belly.

That second the pilot of the dragon side slipped quickly, knowing full well that Red would overshoot him.

As Red leveled off to begin an Immelmann that would bring him around on the dragon's tail he saw one of the gray Fokkers streaming up under Steele's belly, spitting lead from two Spandaus. Steele had his gun and his eyes on another plane, and he never saw the gray hawk sweeping up from below.

Red shouted; a frenzied, silly outburst born of despair. He kicked his rudder over to bring his ship up in a stalling turn in an effort to bring his gun to bear. Too late! German tracers were going

into the belly of Speed's plane. It went over in a sharp vertical bank. A burst of flame, as though long pent up and suddenly released, shot upward.

Poor Speed! The gods of war were answering the prayer he had made in jest. He was going to a long, long sleep.

Red forgot all about the dragon. His gun was coming to bear on the Hun that had sneaked up under Speed. Just as it straightened out of its sharp zoom he let go. Rat, tat, tat! The gun barked with the vicious anger that was Red's. Dead on! Less than a dozen shots and the Fokker was out of control. There now! Follow your victim down, with not a minute to boast of victory. Five against six—no, Russell had one—another flamer. Torches in the sky. Five against five—even up. Now for the dragon. Where was he? Ah, below there, making off. Couldn't stand an even chance, eh?

Red dived like a plummet. At a hundred yards he opened. Off a little. Right aileron and a little rudder. There! Dead on. Fifty rounds through the Lewis, straight into the cockpit. What? No hit? Why, that Hun seemed to absorb lead. No, by George, he *was* vulnerable!

With a crazy flop the Fokker went over on its back just as Red swept over it so close that he held his breath for fear his undercarriage would foul.

He looked back. The Fokker was out of control, spinning down. Maybe. It might be a ruse. That fellow could fly—too well. Better finish him off before he got down against the carpet.

Red brought his plane around and followed down. The moment he was on he sent another stream of bullets after the crippled plane that was falling like a leaf. . . . Ah! They were going home now . . . A flamer! Cut and run, will you? . . . Silly thing to do. You won't pull any trick now. Torches don't come out of spins. . . . Three torches going down, streaking the sky with the perishable record of their passing.

Exultantly Red straightened out and looked around. Two German planes were grooving it for home, hotly pursued by four Nieuports.

Poor Speed. He had been the only one to pay the price for the victory.

Red looked down. The flaming dragon was crashing into a shell battered wood. Over to the right a column of smoke was arising from the ground, just at the edge of the wood. That would be Speed's plane. Friend and foe fallen alike within a hundred yards of each other—just torches.

"Oh, God!" Red said aloud, lifting his eyes to the blue vault of open sky. Then fiercely, as though shouting to some unseen person hurrying by, "I tried, Speed, old boy! I tried."

He turned to look east. Russell was still leading the hounds in full cry after the rabbits.

Now to find the little hillside south of Ypres.

* * * * *

A half hour later he put his plane down in a rough field near the edge of a wood. Three hundred yards up the slope rows of weather-beaten wooden crosses marked the place where dead men lay waiting the day when comrades could find time to give them more suitable monument. A few kilometers away the guns muttered endless requiem.

Slowly, stiffly, Red walked up the slight grade, steeling himself to meet a devastating flood of memories.

He stopped at the first cross, reading the inscription on the corroded disk. No, not that one. On to the next. Wallace Grey, of the 51st Highland Division. What little Scottish cot up in Perthshire or Aberdeenshire would never again know the voice of Wallace Grey?

On to the next. One mustn't let thoughts come. No name at all on this one—only a cross as testimony. The record lost so soon and the guns still muttering. . . . Dead, and with the outcome still in the balance.

At last Red stooped before a cross and straightened quickly, sucking in his breath with a quick intake. Here at his feet lay Daniel McGee. Un-

consciously Red's hand went to his helmet, lifting it. A light breeze toyed with a mop of flaming red hair.

For a long while he stood there, still as the fixed crosses. Memories came, and words heard as distinctly as though uttered by a speaker at his side. A barker was electrifying a crowd of stupid yokels. . . . "Lay-dees and gentlemen! . . . The peerless dare-devil of them all will now take his life in his own hands for your pub-lick a-musement."

The fool barker! Not for the public amusement, but for the public safety.

Slowly Red's hand searched for his pocket, dragging forth two ribbon-dangled crosses. Reverently he stooped over and drove the pins into the soft rotting wood. Then he stepped back, standing stiffly at attention as his eyes were held by the glitter of sunlight on the medals.

His lips moved. Vaguely he heard the sound of his own voice, choked and broken, uttering words that failed to complete all his thoughts.

". . . For valor, Danny. . . . That's what old Brass Hat said. . . . An example to your comrades. . . . And it wasn't in vain—you and Wallace Grey back there—and all the others. . . . The Americans are coming, Danny. . . . New strength, new blood. . . .

That's the trouble, Danny. Still more blood. . . ."

* * * * *

At that same hour back in Paris a long column of khaki clad American soldiers were swinging proudly down the Champs Elysees, their hob-nailed shoes ringing against the pavement in perfect rhythm with the roll of the drums. Crowds lined the streets, cheering, and the windows were choked with faces filled with a new hope and thanksgiving. On, on the column came, a long brown line stretching back to the Arc de Triomphe. At its head a proud drum major blew his whistle and lifted his flashing baton. The snare drums ruffled a long roll and the band blared forth in music that strongly accented the beat of marching feet.

"Over there! Over there!

Send the word"

Boom! Guns in the Place de la Concord began roaring salute. Frightened pigeons wheeled over the flag-decked buildings.

The echoes died and there was the music again, a swinging, compelling cadence suited to words of high promise.

"The Yanks are coming,

The Yanks are coming"

THE END



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